



Early letter names.

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The first alphabet.

The first abecedaries, which we know of, were found in the ruins of Ugarit by the Syrian West Coast. Like the rest of the Ugaritic literature that we know (Dietrich et al. 1995), they were written between 1400 B.C. and 1200 B.C. In the course of time Palestine and Western Syria had many names. One of the names was Canaan and I will use that name. The word Canaan may come from the Semitic word *hanah*, "to encamp, to settle down". About 2000 B.C. Semitic speaking people called Amorites were settled in Canaan (Kinet 1981,21). Since then there has been a continuity in the religion and language of Canaan. The continuity in religion can be seen from the archaeological finds here, even if there were many impulses from the great civilisations (Keel et al. 1992). The language of the native population in Canaan in the periods from where we have written sources has continuously been North West Semitic, which includes Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hebrew, Aramaic and Samaritan. The Ugaritic literature is the best information we have about the Canaanite religion and language before the Bible. In the Late Bronze Age from 1550 BC to 1200 BC the southern part of Canaan was most of the time controlled by powerful Egyptian Pharaohs from the New Kingdom. From this area the only written sources are the letters on clay tablets from Canaan found in Tell el Amarna in Egypt. The North of Canaan was under the influence of both Babylonian culture with Akkadian writing and of the Hittites in Anatolia. So far Ugarit is the only place found with an independent Canaanite literature in the Late Bronze Age.



Figure 1. A clay tablet with an abecedy from Ugarit.(Naveh 1982, Fig 25)

Figure 1 shows a clay tablet with the 30 consonants in the Ugaritic alphabet. The phonemes of the Ugaritic letters are well known, because some lists have been found with Akkadian syllables and the corresponding Ugaritic letters (Cross and Lambdin 1960, 19-26).



Figure 2. Tablet from Ugarit with two abecedaries.(Herdner 1978, 63)

The natural purpose of writing an abecedy would be to learn or memorize the alphabet. Figure 2 shows another abecedy of the Ugaritic alphabet. This time we see the teachers writing first, and below we see

the student's clumsy version. The sequence of the letters is the same in the about ten Ugaritic abecedaries found. When one learns reading and writing it is aloud. Probably nearly all reading and writing in Antiquity was aloud. In order to learn and memorize the alphabet, the letters must have names and the letter names must begin with the phoneme of the letter. In most alphabets these letter names have no meaning, but in a few alphabets like the Germanic runes and the Hebrew alphabet the early letter names had a meaning. It has been suggested that the sequence of the early letter names formed sentences and had some meaning (Speiser 17-21). This idea will be developed in the present work, where the idea will be that the sequence of early letter names makes a poem.

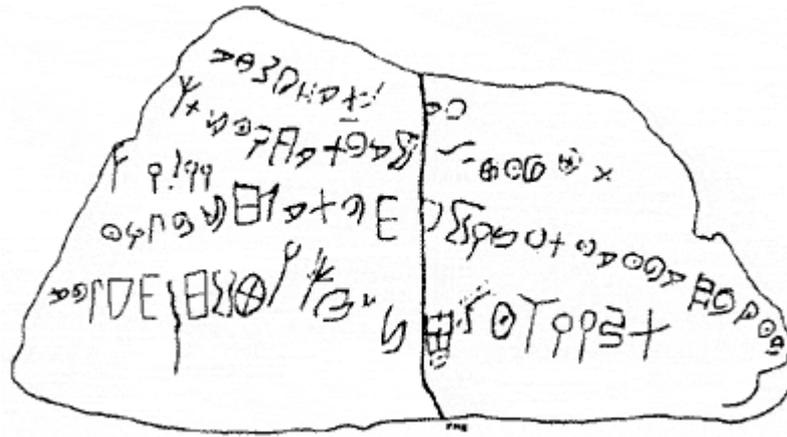


Figure 3. An ostracon with a Proto-Canaanite inscription from Izbet Sartah (Naveh 1982, Fig. 31)

In Figure 3 we see an inscription in the Proto-Canaanite alphabet. The language is called Proto-Canaanite because our knowledge of the language is poor. Only 50 short inscriptions have been discovered in Sinai and Palestine. The inscriptions that are interpreted are in a Semitic language. The Ugaritic inscriptions were made with a stylus in a clay tablet whereas this inscription is incised in a potsherd, also called ostracon. The dating of them is quite uncertain, but as Sass (Sass 1988) says they could be from 1700 B.C. to 1050 B.C. The first decipherment was made by Gardiner. His idea was to use the Semitic words for the pictograms, and then take the first letter out. The Izbet Sartah inscription in Figure 3 is from about 1100 B.C. At the bottom line we also find the only known abecedarium of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet. Here we see an 22-letter alphabet, which is almost the same as the later Phoenician alphabet. The entire inscription is an exercise of a student, and this could explain the few discrepancies compared to the Phoenician alphabet in Figure 4. The letter *m* is missing in the text and has an empty space in the abecedarium. This indicates a mistake of the scribe since the letter *m* is very common in all Semitic texts. Compared to the Phoenician alphabet the two letters *n* and *p* have been interchanged and the letter *w* is moved two places. The writing is from left to right like in Ugaritic, whereas the Phoenician writing is from right to left.

	Ugaritic	Proto-Canaanite	Phoenician	South-Arabia	Latin	Hebrew
1					A	א
2					B	ב
3					C,G	ג
4						
5					D	ד
6					E	ה
7					Y,V	ו
8						
9					H	ח
10						
11					I	י
12					K	כ
13						
14					L	ל
15					M	מ
16						
17					N	נ
18						
19						
20					O	ו
21					P	פ
22					Q	ק
23					R	ר
24					S	ש
25						
26						
27					T	ת
28						
29						
30						

Figure 4. Letter symbols in the order of the Ugaritic alphabet.

It is obvious from the letter symbols in Figure 4, that the Phoenician alphabet has developed from the Proto-Canaanite alphabet. If we ignore the few discrepancies of the Izbet Sartah inscription, we can

assume that the order of the letters were the same too. From Figure 4 we can see that the order of the 22 letters is exactly the same in the Ugaritic alphabet and the Phoenician alphabet but the Ugaritic alphabet has eight letters more. These extra eight letters in the Ugaritic alphabet are put in different places between the other 22 letters. We can conclude that the Ugaritic, the Phoenician and the Proto-Canaanite alphabet have the same origin. When the three alphabets belong to the same tradition, we may assume that their letter names developed from the same early letter names. There are several models for explaining this.

Model 1.

The Proto-Canaanite alphabet with 22 letters was invented first, and later the Ugaritians invented cuneiform letters and added eight letters. Most experts believe in this theory (Millard 1986, 390-398). One of the arguments is that the semivowels no. 28 and no 29 were supposedly introduced for writing Hurritic loan-words. See Figure 4. Semitic has in fact very few words beginning with a vowel. Nevertheless the Hurrite immigrants already came to Canaan about 1650 B.C. (Kinet 1981, 25) The Hurrites may have influenced the Canaanite culture including the religion and the alphabet but this influence might as well be at the first invention of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet. Another argument against this theory is that it does not explain that the eight extra letters were put in between the other letters at some unexplainable places.

Model 2.

The Ugaritic alphabet with 30 letters was invented first, and from this the shorter Proto-Canaanite alphabet was inherited for the use of non-professionals writing on other material than clay. In fact about 15 inscriptions have been discovered with another shorter Ugaritic cuneiform alphabet (Dietrich and Loretz 1988). They are mostly found outside of Ugarit. Since they don't have the standard spelling of words and don't have a standard direction of writing, they are probably written in a dialect or by non-professionals. The Proto-Canaanite alphabet may have developed in a similar way. However it seems highly improbable that the Ugaritic alphabet was invented first, because some of the Proto-Canaanite inscriptions are older than the Ugaritic inscriptions. This leaves us with the third model.

Model 3.

The original alphabet was invented with 30 letters and letter names. Whether the Ugaritic letter symbols for writing in clay or the Proto-Canaanite symbols for writing on other materials was first, we don't know. We don't know the time and place of the invention. The invention was possibly made before the era of Ugaritic literature and in another city-state. The Ugaritic inscriptions are mainly made by professional scribes. They produced a considerable amount of texts, and the texts were kept safe in a temple or a palace. This could be the reason that the original alphabet with 30 letters is preserved in Ugarit. Outside the Ugarit school of writing, people were able to write with the shorter Ugaritic cuneiform alphabet or the Proto-Canaanite alphabet. For writing it was probably not really necessary to have 30 consonant symbols, and outside Ugarit there was no reason to keep this conservative alphabet alive. At the beginning of the Iron Age around 1200 B.C. the "Sea People" wasted Egypt and Canaan. Ugarit was completely destroyed. Since then there were no temple-scribes to preserve the conservative 30-letter alphabet, and only the Proto-Canaanite 22-letter alphabet was used.

Who invented the first alphabet?

It is not surprising that the first alphabet was invented by Semites. In the Semitic languages the meaning of most words depend on three consonants called the root. Vowels and stress can give a minor change in the meaning of a word and can be used for the inflexion of the word. Vowels can change with the Semitic language or dialect. In order to express the meaning it would be sufficient for the Semites to use only

consonant signs. The scribes in Canaan knew many kinds of writing like Akkadian syllable writing from Babylon, and probably also pictograms from Egypt, Cyprus, Crete and Hittite in Anatolia. Many of the texts discovered in Ugarit are nonalphabetic and in non-Ugaritic languages like Hittite or Akkadian.

The idea of using symbols for consonants may have come from Egypt. In the Middle Kingdom hieroglyphs was used as consonants for writing foreign names. The latest example of this praxis dates from the Thirteenth Dynasty 1785 B.C. to 1650 B.C. (Sass 1991, 4-10). If this Egyptian consonant writing was the model for the Canaanite scribes, the invention of the alphabet was a long time before the time of Ugaritic literature 1400 B.C. to 1200 B.C. In Egypt the consonant *p* was written with the hieroglyph “head”, because the Egyptian word for head starts with a *p*. Even if this idea could be used it, would be inconvenient for the Canaanite scribes to take over Egyptian hieroglyphs for writing in their native tongue. For instance they would have to use the hieroglyph “head” for *p*, but the Semitic word for “head” starts with *r*. Furthermore some of the Semitic consonants are not used in Egyptian. The idea that the letter-symbols came from Egyptian hieroglyphs is widely accepted but not correct. Only a few of the hieroglyphs like “head” and “eye” are found among the Proto-Canaanite pictograms and the corresponding phoneme is not the same as in Egyptian. These few words and symbols are so common, that they would inevitably be used in any alphabet.

We may get an idea of the culture and profession of the inventors of the alphabet by looking at the subject of the discovered texts. The Proto-Canaanite texts are mostly written on stones or jars. They are sacrificial texts telling the name of the worshipper, the sacrificed material and the beneficiary god. The purpose of the inscription is to have a permanent documentation of the sacrifice and thereby a lasting effect of it. The alphabetic texts from Ugarit are mostly religious. They are legends, rituals and lists of offerings with month, date, type of sacrifice and the gods who benefit from them. The legends deal with local gods and royal ancestors. There are also prescriptions of medicine and divinations. Most of the Ugaritic texts are in Akkadian or other nonalphabetic writings and many of them were found in the royal palace. But most of the religious texts are in Ugaritic and alphabetic writing and they were found near the great Baal temple. From this information we may conclude, that the religious service for the local gods was in the native language. Therefore writing in the native language would be convenient for priests or scribes in the temple and these people would be nearest for the invention of the alphabet. In Ugarit the royal palace was much greater than the temple and this probably illustrates that the power was centralised in the royal administration. The palace must have had a scribe-school, but the school of alphabetic writing was probably in a Canaanite temple in the first place. If we assume that the alphabet was invented in a Canaanite city-state temple, we could expect that the early letter names and their sequence express fundamental religious ideas of the people of the temple. In that way the alphabet would be easy to accept and remember, for the temple scribes. We may even expect that the alphabet gives information about the worshipping of the gods in the temple.

We don't know in which city-state and at what time the alphabet was invented. The only library with alphabetic writing discovered so far is the Ugaritic. The great age and the wide distribution of the Proto-Canaanite inscriptions talks in favour of an earlier invention possibly in another Canaanite city-state than Ugarit. A possible time of the invention could be the Middle Bronze Age in the period from 1750 B.C. to 1550 B.C. In this period Egypt was weak. The Canaanite city-states had a growing power maybe because they were invaded by powerful Hurrites (Kinet 1981, 25). Some Canaanites even immigrated or fled into the northern Nile Delta, where they had their own kings known as Hyksos, which means “the rulers from abroad”. After this period we find Canaanite gods in the Egyptian pantheon. In the Middle Bronze Age the Canaanite city-states seem to be independent of Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture. Perhaps this would be the time for the first writing in the native Proto-Canaanite language and invention of the alphabet.

Later alphabets

In the present article there wouldn't be room for a description of the development of all the later alphabets, which is a complicated process described elsewhere (Naveh 1982)(Diringer 1968). Only the first offshoots of the first alphabet will be discussed. The Phoenician alphabet was used in Canaan from about 1050 B.C. to 800 B.C. The Phoenician alphabet has 22 letters in a well established form and

sequence. The writing is from right to left. Figure 4 shows the pictograms of the Phoenician and the Ugaritic letters. We see that eight of the 30 Ugaritic letters are missing in the Phoenician alphabet. An explanation of the missing eight letters could be that they were unnecessary for ordinary writing. Figure 6 shows the phonemes of The Ugaritic alphabet and we see that this alphabet had many sibilants (s-sounds) , namely number 8, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22, 25 and 30. Four of them are dropped in Phoenician, namely number 13, 16, 18 and 30. In addition another four Ugaritic letters was dropped , namely number 4, (one of the tree h's), number 26,(one of the two g's), and number 28 and 29, (two of the three semivowels).

The Phoenicians were good seamen, and their alphabet had a widespread effect on the writing in the Mediterranean Area and the Near East. The oldest inscriptions found in the South-Arabic alphabet are from the eighth century B.C. But Sass (Sass 1991, 93) says: “although the earliest texts did not survive, the script of the oldest extant inscriptions seems not to have changed much; several letter forms in these inscriptions demonstrate that the Arabs learned the concept of alphabetic writing from the Phoenicians or their neighbours and applied it to their own language in the eleventh or tenth century It is unthinkable that in the period in question a rich, export-oriented kingdom could remain illiterate for a considerable length of time; the emergence of the kingdom of Sheba cannot be substantially earlier than the adoption of the alphabet in Arabia”. Sass here refers to evidences of an advanced civilisation in South Arabia already at the end of the second millennium B.C. probably caused by irrigation by means of dams and by domestication of the dromedary. The visit of the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem is known from the Old Testament and dates from the tenth century B.C.

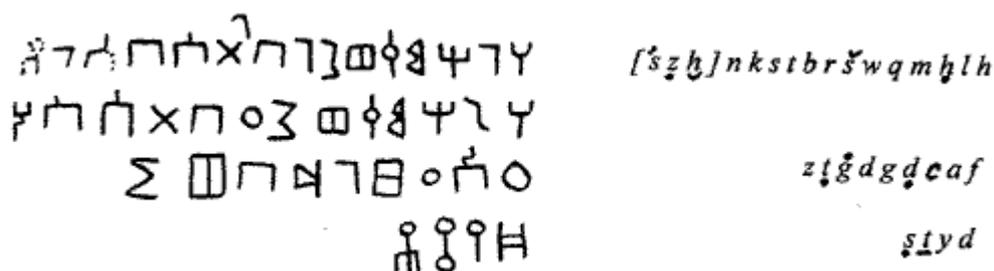


Figure 5. South-Arabic inscription with abecedary from el- Ula. (Jaussen and Savignac 1920, Pl.CXXVI).

The South-Arabic inscription in Figure 5. goes from right to left. The second line is probably a student exercise where the *r* is replaced with an *c* and later the correct *r* is put in at the top. Tree letters are not preserved in the inscription here, but they are added in the [] in Figure 5 because they are known from other abecedaries. We see that the South-Arabic alphabet has 29 letters. According to the remark of Sass the South-Arabic alphabet is inspired by the Phoenician alphabet. In that case we have to consider the possibility that some, may be all, of the letter names of the 22 Phoenician letters have been used again in the South Arabian alphabet. Seven of the South Arabic letters have new names and symbols and the sequence of the 29 letters is completely different from the Ugaritic sequence. In Figure 4 the South Arabic letter symbols are listed beside the Ugaritic letter symbol with the same phoneme. One letter *d* is omitted because this South Semitic phoneme is not found in Ugaritic. The South Arabic alphabet is the ancestor of the Classical Ethiopian alphabet. This is obvious from the similar sequence of the letters and similar letter symbols. South Arabian people immigrated to Ethiopia in the first millennium B.C. and with them came their language and their alphabet. We know the Ethiopian letter names and it is possible that they have developed from the South Arabic letter names.

The Greeks took over both symbols and letter names from the Phoenician alphabet. The Phoenician alphabet consists of only consonants and was therefore not sufficient for the non-Semitic Greeks. Consequently they added signs for vowels. The question has been raised whether the Phoenician alphabet was really an alphabet and not merely a syllable-script (Gelb 1963). But each Phoenician letter is a symbol for several possible syllables with the same consonant and represents only the consonant. It would then be more fair to say that the Phoenician alphabet is incomplete. Based on the Phoenician alphabet the first complete alphabet was created by the Greeks around 800 B.C. At first the Greek Islands

had different scripts. The Greeks' traditional explanation of their word for book, *biblos*, was that writing came from Byblos, the main city of the Phoenicians. From Greek we have the English word bible, which means "book". The Greeks took over the Phoenician letter names without speculating about the meaning of the names. The Hebrew letter names are descendants of the Phoenician letter names and therefore they have some similarity to the Greek letter names.

When an alphabet is taken into use in a new language, it will often be necessary to add some letters for special phonemes. The Greek alphabet gave rise to both the Latin alphabet and the Cyrillic alphabet and from them came most of the European alphabets. In Figure 4 we have a list of Latin letter-symbols. The Latin letter symbols in the list have developed from the Phoenician symbols, but the phonemic value may have changed. An Old Hebrew alphabet also developed from the Phoenician. In fact until the exile of the Jews in Babylon in 586 B.C., there is very little difference between the Old Hebrew letter symbols and the Phoenician letter symbols. The order of the letters is the same too. The Phoenician alphabet also gave rise to the Aramaic. From the Aramaic script, used as an official language in the Persian empire, came Persian, Indian, Arabic and Hebrew. The earliest Arabic inscriptions are from the 6. century A.D. The order of the letters in the Arabic alphabet is completely new and the letter symbols deviate very much from the Aramaic. In Figure 4 we see a list of the Hebrew alphabet. This so called Square Hebrew script was used by the Jews, who returned from Babylonian captivity. This script is very similar to Aramaic.

Hebrew letter names and Ethiopic letter names

In Figure 6, we have a list of the Hebrew letter names. In the present article, the Hebrew letters will be transliterated according to Encyclopaedia Britannica (Atkinson 1966), The transliterated letter can be seen as the first letter of the transliterated letter name. The letter with the name *cyin* will be written as "c", not lifted because some computers can not write lifted letters. For the same reason some other transliterated letters will not be written the traditional way. For instance the Hebrew letter **sin*, will be written as **s*". The phoneme is the same as "sh" in the English word "shine". The Hebrew words will mostly be biblical Hebrew from before 300 A.D. and the pronunciation will be the Sephardic (or modern).

Some of the Hebrew letter names or at least the three consonants of their roots have a meaning which is clearly the same as the meaning of the corresponding Proto-Canaanite pictogram. Those are *àlef*= "oxhead", *bet*= "house", *cyin*= "eye", *pe*= "mouth", and *ro*s*= "head". This observation confirms that the early letter names had the same meaning as the pictograms of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet. Some authors (Olmstead 1931) have suggested that even the Ugaritic letter symbols are pictograms, and this hypothesis will be used below. For example number 2 could be a "house", number 17 could be a "snake" and number 20 could be an "eye".

In Figure 6, we also have a list of some Ethiopic letter names (Gesenius 1962, IX). The Ethiopic alphabet has 26 letters with approximately the same sequence and the same letter symbols as the South Arabic alphabet. Four of the Ethiopian letters *h*, *p*, *p*, *d* are not found in the Hebrew alphabet but *h* and *d* are found in the South Arabic alphabet. According to Sass (Sass 1991, 92) the earliest list of Ethiopic letter names is found in a translation of the New Testament printed in Rome in 1548. It is possible that the Ethiopic letter names are an invention of some European missionaries in the 16th century. On the other hand it is also possible that some of the names belong to an oral tradition independent of the Greek and Hebrew tradition and going back to the Phoenician letter names. The most remarkable indication of the last possibility is the letter *n* with the Ethiopic letter name *nahas* = "serpent". This name is clearly the meaning of the Proto-Canaanite pictogram and seems to be a better preservation of the early letter name than the Hebrew letter name *nun*.

The observation that some of the Hebrew and the Ethiopic letter names have the same meaning as the Proto-Canaanite pictograms indicates that the letter names have developed from the early letter names even if most of the letter names have lost their original meaning in the course of time. Following my previous argument that the original alphabet had 30 letters, the meaning of some of the early letter names would probably become obscure when the early alphabet lost eight letters. This would happen before the

period of Phoenician writing 1050-800 B.C. The process that the letter names lose their meaning goes together with the process that the letter symbols lose their meaning as pictograms. Once one has learned to use the letters as phonemes and as parts of well known words, it will be disturbing for the reading and writing, when the individual letters have an extra meaning beside the phoneme. This is the reason why the letter names and especially their vowels have developed differently from the meaningful words they originally were. Some of the Hebrew letter names are presumable constructed by omitting other consonants than the first or by doubling the consonant and thus have no meaning beside the phoneme. Those are *he*, *waw*, *.tet*, *mem* and *nun*.

When we study the individual letter names below, the search for the early letter name will include a discussion of the Hebrew letter name and the Ethiopic letter name, if there happens to be one. But the primary purpose of the study will be to find the Ugaritic letter names. The Ugaritic scribes had learned their 30-letter alphabet and consequently knew the early letter names. Therefore we could expect that the scribes used these words in the Ugaritic texts. If the alphabet was invented before the time of Ugaritic literature 1400-1200 B.C. some of the early letter names could have been out of daily use. But in fact we find almost all these roots except one in the Ugaritic texts. See the Ugaritic letter names in Figure 6.

Semitic expressions

As earlier mentioned we must expect that the sequence of the letter names express something meaningful. The Semitic languages have a special possibility to make a statement by just putting two nouns together. For example the Ugaritic expression *alp bt* could mean “the ox of the temple” because *alp* could mean “ox” and *bt* could mean “temple”. This is a special case where the first dependent noun is in the so called construct case and the last independent noun is in the genitive case. The first noun *alp* belongs to the domain of the second *bt*. Originally, the Semitic languages had the ending *-u* in the nominative and constructive and the ending *-i* in the genitive. Therefore the pronunciation of the Ugaritic expression could have been *alfu beti*. The endings are preserved in classical Arabic but have disappeared in Hebrew. The Hebrew expression with the same meaning is *alef habayit*. We can see that some extra vowels have been inserted between the consonants in the Ugaritic words. Another difference is that the prefix *ha-* is used in Hebrew to express the definite, whereas there is no difference in Ugaritic between the definite and the indefinite. In Semitic expressions, one normally has to begin with the subject followed by the predicate. The predicate, that tells something about the subject can be a noun. Therefore it is possible to express something meaningful by putting two nouns together. Considering this Semitic way of expression in the construct case, I expect that the 30 early letter names in the Ugaritic alphabet taken two by two make up 15 phrases. The first word is the dependant part, and it belongs to the second independent part.

Another characteristic phenomena in ancient Semitic poetry is parallelism. Parallelisms means that every line or verse is repeated in some other words, which express the same idea (Korpel and de Moor 1986, 173-212). It is very common in the Old Testament and almost general in Ugaritic legends. We will show a very simple example from Ugarit. These two verses are repeated, whenever the goddess Asherat travels, because she doesn't have wings like the other gods. She says to her servant:

<i>mdl cr</i>	Saddle a he-ass,
<i>.smd p.hl</i>	harness a male. (KTU 1,19,II,4-5).

I expect that the whole alphabet is a poem of 15 verses and that the verses are coupled by means of parallelism.

Hypotheses

When we look for one of the 30 early letter names, we can be sure that the first phoneme in the root is the phoneme of the Ugaritic letter, but we don't know the last two phonemes in the root. An Ugaritic dictionary has about 25 roots in average for each letter and a Hebrew dictionary has about 100. In order to reduce the number of possibilities to one, we must look for more information. We have a hint in the

Proto-Canaanite pictograms. Albright (Albright 1966) has found some early letter names on the basis of the Proto-Canaanite pictograms, but some of his suggestions are merely guesses. In consequence of the previous discussion in this article, I have found it reasonable to make the following three hypotheses.

1.

The Ugaritic letter symbols are pictograms, having the same meaning as the corresponding early letter names. This implies that the creators of the Ugaritic pictograms have invented a special iconographic symbolism in order to make pictograms with as few wedges as possible.

2.

The Ugaritic alphabet is a poem. More precisely this means that the early letter names taken two by two in alphabetic order make verses in the construct case. The verses have parallelism.

3.

The alphabet is invented in a Canaanite temple. Consequently the poem expresses the beliefs of people of that time or at least the beliefs of the staff of the temple. We can expect that the subject of the poem is essential religious ideas and rituals. The religious life was ruled by the lunar calendar and the lunar phases. The week of seven days is much later and probably invented by Babylonian astronomers in Assyrian time about 700 B.C. The assumption will be, that the 30 letters is a list of the days in the month. This idea was proposed by Moran and Kelley (Moran and Kelley 1969).

The individual letter names.

	Ugaritic phoneme	Hebrew letter name	Ethiopic letter name	Ugaritic early letter name	Pronunciation of early letter name	Meaning of early letter name
1	<i>a</i>	<i>`alef</i>	<i>alf</i>	<i>alp</i>	<i>`alfu</i>	ox
2	<i>b</i>	<i>bet</i>	<i>bet</i>	<i>bt</i>	<i>`beti</i>	temple
3	<i>g</i>	<i>`gimel</i>	<i>gaml</i>	<i>gml</i>	<i>`gamlu</i>	crescent
4	<i>h</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>harm</i>	<i>ht</i>	<i>hatti</i>	sceptre
5	<i>d</i>	<i>`dalet</i>	<i>dent</i>	<i>[d]clt</i>	<i>`dacltu</i>	fuel
6	<i>h</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>hoi</i>	<i>hdd</i>	<i>`haddi</i>	the Howler
7	<i>w</i>	<i>waw</i>	<i>wawè</i>	<i>[w]qy</i>	<i>waqeyu</i>	veneration
8	<i>z</i>	<i>`zayin</i>	<i>zai</i>	<i>zġ[n]</i>	<i>zaġani</i>	the Pealer
9	<i>h</i>	<i>het</i>	<i>hawt</i>	<i>hrt</i>	<i>haratu</i>	ploughing
10	<i>t</i>	<i>tet</i>	<i>tait</i>	<i>[t]it</i>	<i>taiti</i>	soil
11	<i>y</i>	<i>yod</i>	<i>yaman</i>	<i>ydm</i>	<i>yadamu</i>	hands
12	<i>k</i>	<i>kaf</i>	<i>kaf</i>	<i>kp</i>	<i>`kafi</i>	hollow
13	<i>*s</i>	<i>sin</i>		<i>sn</i>	<i>`senmu</i>	shine
14	<i>l</i>	<i>`lamed</i>	<i>`lawe</i>	<i>laf[b]</i>	<i>lawi</i>	flame
15	<i>m</i>	<i>mem</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>my</i>	<i>`mayu</i>	water
16	<i>d</i>			<i>drq</i>	<i>daraq</i>	sprinkling
17	<i>n</i>	<i>mun</i>	<i>naḥaš</i>	<i>nhš</i>	<i>`naḥsu</i>	serpent
18	<i>z</i>			<i>zhr</i>	<i>zahari</i>	brightness
19	<i>s</i>	<i>`samek</i>	<i>sat</i>	<i>sad</i>	<i>saadu</i>	serving
20	<i>c</i>	<i>c yin</i>	<i>cin</i>	<i>cnt</i>	<i>cnati</i>	the Source
21	<i>p</i>	<i>pe</i>	<i>af</i>	<i>pcr</i>	<i>pacaru</i>	proclaiming
22	<i>s</i>	<i>šade</i>	<i>šaday</i>	<i>sdq</i>	<i>šadaqi</i>	the Righteous
23	<i>q</i>	<i>qof</i>	<i>kaf</i>	<i>qbr</i>	<i>qavaru</i>	burial
24	<i>r</i>	<i>res</i>	<i>rees</i>	<i>riš</i>	<i>reesi</i>	the first
25	<i>t</i>		<i>sawt</i>	<i>td</i>	<i>tdu</i>	breast
26	<i>*g</i>	<i>ġ</i>		<i>ġlm</i>	<i>ġalumu</i>	youth
27	<i>t</i>	<i>taw</i>	<i>`tawe</i>	<i>twr</i>	<i>`tawru</i>	turn
28	<i>i</i>			<i>ib</i>	<i>ebbi</i>	the Vigorous
29	<i>o</i>			<i>ur</i>	<i>uru</i>	light
30	<i>s</i>			<i>[shr]</i>	<i>šahri</i>	Moon

Figure 6. The Ugaritic alphabet and letter names.

Now we will examine the individual letters in the Ugaritic alphabet. The traditional numbering of the Ugaritic letters was done before the abecedaries was found, but here we have to number the letters

according to the abecedaries. After the letter number, we state the Ugaritic phoneme which is also to be seen in Figure 6. The transliteration of the Ugaritic letters is according to KTU (Segert 1984, 21) and 22 of them have the same transliteration as the corresponding Hebrew letters. Most of the early letter names that we find, have roots that can be found in a word from the Ugaritic literature. In the few cases when the root or part of it is not found in Ugaritic, this part will be reconstructed and marked with []. These roots that we will find are supposed to be the early letter names in Ugaritic and they are listed in Figure 6. Linguists have been able to reconstruct the pronunciation of Akkadian, the Semitic language spoken in Mesopotamia. On the basis of Akkadian it is possible to deduce the pronunciation of Ugaritic. The Canaanite language spoken by the inventors of the alphabet may even be older, since the alphabet may be as old as 1700 B.C. (Sass 1988). In Figure 6 is listed the pronunciation, that I assume was used in Ugaritic. The approximate meaning of the name in English is also shown in Figure 6. It is impossible to find a contemporary English word that has exactly the same meaning as a Semitic word in the Bronze Age, because of the difference in culture.

Number 1. a.

The Hebrew letter name *`alef* has no meaning, but with the same root *alp* we have *èlef*, which means “ox” or “thousand” according to the Hebrew lexicon (Gesenius 1906). The meaning “ox” is not used in postbiblical Hebrew, but the plural *`alpim* = “oxen” can be found in the Bible (Pr.14,4.) The word *alp* is found in Ugaritic, meaning “ox” or “thousand” according to the Ugaritic lists of words (Gordon 1965, 201-202) (Aistleitner 1963, 241-242). The Ugaritic word *ulp* means “chief, prince” referring to 202 in Gordon. In Hebrew a similar word is *ùllup* = “chief”. From these different meanings, I guess that the meaning of the old Semitic root *alp* was “a great one” made up from *al* (= “great”) and the suffix *-p* making the word a noun. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram is obviously an oxhead and this principle is preserved in the Phoenician, Greek and the Latin letter symbol. The South-Arabic letter symbol is typical of the “square style“ of this alphabet, but it has horns and legs and could be a pictogram meaning “ox”. The Aramaic letter symbol of *`alef* began to change about 800 B.C. (Naveh 1982, 89) and the square Hebrew symbol, taken from the Aramaic symbol, does not resemble an “oxhead” at all. One of the reasons for this change could be, that the ox, as a religious icon was forgotten. This could also explain that *`alef* occurs only a few times in the Bible, where the mentioning of an ox is almost idolatry. The meaning of the Ugaritic pictogram couldn’t be an oxhead. We will see below in the Ugaritic pictograms number 17 and number 27 that the meaning of a horizontal line is to show the unseen, the “invisible”. Pictogram number 1 therefore means “spirit of the great one”. I will try to explain this meaning of the pictogram below, when I comment on the first verse of the alphabet. The early letter name in Ugaritic is *alp*. The Akkadian pronunciation was probably *alpu*, but the Arabic and Ethiopic pronunciation is *alf*. We don’t know exactly when and where the change from *p* to *f* took place. Since Arabic is the modern language most similar to Ugaritic I will choose the pronunciation *alfu*. The suffix *-u* is the nominative ending in Ugaritic. The direct meaning of the letter name is probably “the ox”.

Number 2. b.

The Hebrew letter name *bet* has the root *byt* and this is also the root of the word *bayit* = “house”. The short pronunciation *bet* is also found in Hebrew in the construct case for example in *bet `lehem* = “house of bread”. The Arabic and Ethiopic word for “house” is *bet*. The Ugaritic pictogram resembles a square as does one of the Proto-Canaanite pictograms. The other Proto-Canaanite pictogram could be a house with courtyard. The South-Arabic letter symbol is almost a square, and could be a pictogram meaning “house” (1.Sam,5.5.). In Ugaritic (KTU.1,19. III,153) we have the expression *bt il*, meaning “the temple of God”. In the Old Testament we find similar expressions like *bayit Dagon* = “Dagons temple”. The early letter name in Ugaritic is *bt*. When we take the genitive ending the pronunciation will be *beti*. Since we use the hypothesis that the alphabet was invented in a temple, we will choose the meaning “temple” or rather “the temple”. There is no definite article in Ugaritic. and the last meaning is more accurate as the habitant of the city state would probably think of a particular ox in a particular temple. The first two letter names make the verse:

alp bt

àlfu beti

the ox of the temple

This is a reasonable statement in construct case. Several ox-statues have been found in the ruins of temples in Ugarit and other places in Canaan (Caquot Pl. VI). The ox in the verse could be the statue of an ox residing in the temple. The statue of the ox in the temple is equivalent to God. Some of the Ugaritic gods, male and female took the shape of an ox when ever they felt like doing so. El the father-god and creator of the world was a “bull”. An example from another culture is the Greek father-god Zeus, who also took the shape of an ox. When El has intercourse with goddesses, they can ask him to be an ox to them. (KTU.1,19. III,153) A possible explanation of the Ugaritic pictogram for letter number 1 is the male organ, symbolising that El is the creator of the world and father of the gods.

However the verse could also have a deeper meaning. As mentioned before, the Ugaritic pictogram number 1 could be understood as the invisible “spirit of the great one, the spirit of the ox, the spirit of God”. The verse can then be understood as “God’s spirit is in the temple”. Furthermore El’s house is not just the temple but the whole world, that he himself has created. We are told that he lives “at the source of the two floods, between the beddings of the two primordial depths”(KTU. 1.4, IV,21) The two floods are heaven and sea and between them is the world. Heaven was conceived as a flood of water, where the celestial bodies were floating. In Egypt the Sun God Ra was depicted sailing in a ship across the sky. In the Old Testament we can read (Gen. 1.9.) : “Then God began to create the wide space and to make a barrier between the waters below the wide space and the waters above the wide space.” Notice that God didn’t create the waters. They were already there. God’s merit seem to be the ingenious work of building the wide space and the forms of the objects out of the raw materials. If we prefer to see “the temple” as a metaphor for “the world” the meaning of the verse could be “the Creator of the World”. The first letter in the alphabet is the beginning of the creation of all words. It seems reasonable to begin the alphabet poem with the Creator. Another point is that the first letter in the alphabet corresponds to the first day of the month. This day of the New Moon was a religious festival in Ugarit, when El was worshipped. For instance an offering list says “On the day of the New Moon grapes were offered for El” (KTU 1.41,2.). To this day the Jews celebrate the first day of the lunar month called *Ro*s .Hode*s*= “first of the new” and praise the Creator.

Number 3. *g*

We don’t know the meaning of the Hebrew letter name *gimel* but with the same root *gml* we have *gàmal*= “camel”. It’s a common belief that the early letter name means “camel”, and this could explain the Proto-Canaanite pictogram but it doesn’t explain the Ugaritic pictogram. The word for camel is *udr* in Ugaritic (KTU.1.4, V,17.). The first textual evidence to the word “camel” appears in Assyrian records in the 9th century B.C. of a battle in North Syria against some Arab nomads (Schwartz 1995, 256). It is possible that a word with the root *gml* means “divine” because it is made by the two Hebrew words *gam*= “also, as” and *el*= “God”. Then we have to look for another divine creature than the camel. Albright (Albright 1966) has proposed the meaning “throw -stick” because *gaml* means “throw-stick” in Ethiopian. Throw-sticks and camels are not mentioned in Ugaritic. In the Ugaritic poem about the marriage of the Moon-God we have the name *gml*= “sickle” in the context. “Hilal, master of the sickle.” (KTU, 1.24:41.)

Hilal means “the shining one” in Hebrew and Arabic and in Ethiopian it means “Moon-crescent”. He is a Moon-god. In Akkadian we have the word “*gamlu*” = “scimitar”, a sword in sickle form, symbol for the Mesopotamian Moon-God Sin. (Assyrian 1956, 5.35). In the Stone Age and Bronze Age the sickle was made of stone and looked like the crescent of the Moon. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram is probably a crescent and the same thing can be said of the South-Arabic letter symbol. The Ugaritic pictogram is a straight vertical wedge, but it is acceptable as a picture of the crescent, since it is impossible to carve bent curves with a single wedge. The early letter name in Ugaritic is *gml*. As to the pronunciation, the Akkadian and Ethiopian are more original than the Hebrew and I will choose *gamlu*. In Bronze Age Canaan crescents are depicted on steles (Keel and Uehlinger 1992) and on a cylinder seal, where the crescent is placed on top of a standard beside a god (Parker 1949, No. 190). The meaning “crescent” of the letter name could be an icon in the temple, or it could be the Moon-crescent.

Number 4. *h*.

The phoneme *ḥ* is pronounced like *ch* in German “bächer”. This phoneme is not used in Hebrew and there is no Hebrew letter symbol or letter name. In Hebrew the voiced velar fricative *ḥ* is replaced with the voiced pharyngeal fricative *ḥ*. There is no Phoenician or Proto-Canaanite letter symbol. The South-Arabian letter symbol and the Ethiopic letter name are inventions independent of the Phoenician alphabet and consequently they don't concern us here. There is only one appropriate Ugaritic word (Aistleitner 1016) *ḥ.t* = “staff, sceptre, penis” (KTU 1.19.I,14). In Hebrew we have the word *.ḥò.tar* = “rod, staff, sceptre”. In Akkadian we have *.ḥa.t.tu* = “staff”. The Ugaritic pictogram fits very well with the meaning “sceptre”. The pronunciation was probably close to the Akkadian. We have to use the genitive ending here *ḥa.t.ti*. The last two letters give us the verse

gml ḥ.t gamlu ḥa.t.ti crescent of the sceptre

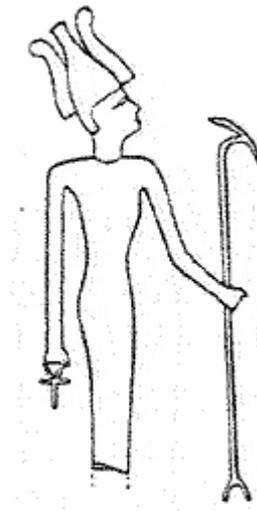


Figure 7. Anat with was-sceptre. Part of stele from Bet Shean 13th cent. B.C. (Keel and Uehlinger 1992, Fig.108).

The goddess in Figure 7 from Bet Shean is identified as the city goddess Anat, because she is named in an Egyptian inscription on the stele. In the 13. cent. B.C. Beth Shean in Central Canaan was an important centre for Egypt. The expensive monumental steles were made in Egyptian style for people related to the occupying power. But the Goddess Anat is Canaanite. The Was sceptre is a common attribute for Egyptian deities. As far as I know the symbolism of the was-sceptre has not been explained. The head of an ant-eater is one of the theories. The was-sceptre looks more like a crescent to me. It is possible that the verse simply refers to a was-sceptre or a sceptre in another style. In that case we have a parallelism in the two verses because the ox and the crescent are both divine creatures, and they are placed in holy places respectively in the temple and on the sceptre.

We may choose to understand the verse as a metaphor. The word crescent comes from the Latin *crescere* = “grow, create”, and could relate to the creation of the Moon, when it is waxing. But I believe that the crescent is a symbol of creative power for example food production and building but primarily creating offspring. The two horns of an ox make the shape of a crescent and therefore the crescent can be seen as a symbol of reproductive power. Gods have horns because the horns symbolise power, particularly the power of creating life. When the Moon's crescent appears after three days absence, the Bronze Age people would say it is reborn from death. This shows the power of creation in the crescent. In pagan religions, nature is part of the divine, including the crescent on the sceptre, the sickle, the horns of an ox and the crescent of the Moon, and when they look like each other, they are supposed to have the same kind of power. A sceptre is a symbol of the master, the ruler, his power or his might. His sceptre symbolizes a club or a penis. Production is accomplished with the master's club and reproduction is accomplished with his penis. The word *ht* in the meaning “penis” can be found in the Ugaritic text about El's love affair (KTU 1,23,40). (de Moor 1972, 21). This text is difficult to translate because there are many metaphors, but it is also interesting because it is the only text we have which describes some details of the creation of the world.. El has intercourse with two Goddesses, and they cry several times: “Oh my husband, my

husband, lower your staff.” We could expect the phases of the Moon to be controlled by the Moon God, called Yarikh in Ugarit. But like all the gods he was an offspring of the supreme god El, who chose him for the job. According to Handy (Handy 1994, 66) the Syro-Palestinian Pantheon can be looked upon as a hierarchic bureaucracy similar to the organisation of the city state. The highest authority is the creator god or the king. Handy says: ”The Chief Executive who has properly fulfilled the task of setting up the organisation succeeds in properly carrying out the office of highest authority by not doing the work of the organisation, since doing the work of the organisation is the task of those on lower levels of the authority.” Active gods like the Moon god Yarikh and the Ugaritic city god Hadad were both sons of El, who owned the Universe, and they had a specific sphere of authority over which to exert their control.

The parallelism of the two first verses appears when we see that both verses express that the supreme God is the creator. In the first verse, he creates the World in general. The second verse is more specific and describes how he goes on creating new creatures and new times with the help of the crescent.. The two verses express that the power belongs to God, but we have to remember that the power is administrated from the temple and the palace. The city God is the ruler and owner of the city and he chooses the king to take care of the territory. King Keret (KTU. 1.14: II,13-26).

was told to “sacrifice to the Bull, your father El, serve Baal by your sacrifice.” The sceptre also symbolises order and control. God controlled the Crescent, but the royal administration controlled the duties and pleasures of the people according to the time of the month. The Canaanite city state was centralised, which can be seen alone from the enormous royal palace. Even the temple with its rituals was under the control of the king. The offering lists show that most of the offerings was given by the royal family.

Number 5. *d*.

The Hebrew letter name *dalet* has no meaning that we know of, but another Hebrew word with the same root *dlt* is *dèlet*= “door or page”. If the Proto-Canaanite pictogram depicts a door, the door has to be triangular. Albright thinks that the early letter name is *dag*= “fish”, because a picture of a fish is found between the Proto-Canaanite pictograms in Sinai. The fish there is probably not a letter but a symbol for a goddess, as we see in Figure 8a. The fish does not fit with the very elaborate Canaanite pictogram. The Ethiopic letter name *dent* could be related to the Arabic and Ugaritic word *dn* = “jar for bread” 680 in Gordon. This could explain the South-Arabic letter symbol, but it can not explain the Ugaritic pictogram. When we discuss letter number 14 and 29 below, it will be clear that three vertical wedges in a horizontal line means flames. Hebrew words with *d* connected with fire are *dalèqet*= “inflammation” and *dèleq*= “fuel, inflammable material”. In the Ugaritic pictogram we have the fuel as the three horizontal wedges under the flames. This is a picture of a fire offering. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram also depicts a fire offering. The fuel can be fat and bones from the sacrificed animals, cakes, oil, wood or incense. We have a Ugaritic word *clt* = “torch” (KTU 1,23,35), (Pope 1979, 701), and the word *cly*= ”to go up, burnt offering” 2030 in Aistleitner. We have a corresponding Hebrew word *colah*= *colat* = “whole burnt offering”. In Ugaritic the prefix *d-* means “that of” or “for”. The suffix *-t* is often used for the formation of abstract nouns. Therefore we can reconstruct the Ugaritic word *[d]clt*= “material for burning” or “fuel”. The pronunciation could have been *dacltu*. From this the Hebrew letter name *dalet* has developed in the normal way by dropping the ending and introducing a vowel *-e*. The difficult consonant is replaced by stress on the first syllable.

Number 6. *h*.

The Hebrew letter name *he* means “Aha!”. The Ethiopic letter name *hoy* means “Alas!”. None of these explain the pictograms. There are few Ugaritic nouns beginning with a *h*. If the word has to make a statement with the burnt-offering from the last letter I can only find two: *hll* = “Hilal, the Moon-god, the shining one” and *hdd* = “Hadad, the Storm-god, the Shouter, the Howler”. Both names are known in Hebrew. The Ugaritic pictogram shows three horizontal wedges above each other. This symbol will be found again below in the Ugaritic pictogram number 28, and the meaning seems to be “air” or “wind”. In the Proto-Canaanite pictogram we have again three parallel lines. The vertical line perpendicular to them could be a tree with branches or a pole with cords blowing in the wind. Of the two deities the pictograms

favours *hdd*. The Storm God is known as *Addu* in Aramaic and in Akkadian, so the Ugaritic pronunciation was probably *haddi* with the genitive ending. In order to introduce the weather- and storm-god in English in a respectful and informative way, I will call him “the Howler”. The last two letter names makes the verse.

[d]clt *hdd*

dacltu haddi

fuel for the Howler

When the fire was consuming the sacrifice of the altar it was probably understood as the Storm-God eating it. In the Old Testament we have the same idea (Isa. 30,27), (Deut.4.,24):“The tongue of Jahweh is a devouring fire”. “Jahweh your El is a devouring fire”. The male gods El and Hadad are invisible, they can be observed only as spirits, air, sound, fire, heat, steam, fragrance and smoke. Most of the fuel will disappear at the burning and the invisible gods must have consumed it. The fire offerings was one of the most important activities in a Canaanite temple. This can be seen from the Ugaritic texts and from the Old Testament.

Number 7. *w*.

The Hebrew letter name *waw* means “hook”. Many people dealing with early letter names think that the pictograms must be hooks. Albright thinks it is a mace. None of these objects look like the pictograms. Following the hypothesis of parallelism, we must look for a word beginning with *w* having something to do with offering. There are very few words beginning with *w* in Hebrew as well as in Ugaritic. This is because there is a characteristic change in Northwest Semitic languages of initial *w-* to *y-*. (Segert 1984, 36). A few words beginning with *w* are still found in Ugaritic. This means that we may look for Hebrew words beginning with *y-* and South Semitic (Arabic) words beginning with *w-*.

1. *wld*= “bearing, child”. Tsumera (Tsumara 1979, 779) explains that this word is vocalised *wulad* and because of the *-u-* coming from the passive, the *w* has been preserved.

2. [*wqr*]= “honour, praising”. This word is a reconstruction. We only have Arabic words *waqara*= “to honour, respect”, *waqaarun*= “dignity” and Hebrew *yeqar*= “honour”.

3. [*w*]qy= “obedience, listening”. In Ugaritic is found an inflected form *dtqyn* meaning “who is obeyed”. Corresponding Arabic words are *waqiha*= “be obedient” and *waqa*= “preserve”. According to Gesenius p 429, some South-Arabic inscriptions have the word *wqh* meaning “hear, listen”. The Hebrew word is *yiqehah*= “obedience”.

The first word of these three is not easy to connect with the poem or the pictograms. The last two words both have to do with respect for a god, and the Proto-Canaanite pictogram can be interpreted as a person lifting his arms to worship the god. When we interpret the Ugaritic pictogram we can use the information from the pictogram of the Ugaritic letter number 24 *r* where the two horizontal wedges above each other means “mouth”. Out of the mouth here in number 7, we see the pictogram of the Ugaritic letter number 1 *a* and that is God’s Name. The meaning of the pictogram is then praising God. I have no idea how to explain the South-Arabic pictogram. When we have to choose between 2 and 3, I take 3 because it is partly found in Ugaritic, (not that this is of great importance). This is the only early letter name, which is not found in Ugaritic and it could be an argument against the whole hypothesis of the alphabet poem. On the other hand it could be used as an argument for the idea that the alphabet poem was invented in a place where *w-* was still in use and inherited by the Ugaritians, who had changed *w-* to *y-* in their daily language. If we look at the Arabic word, the pronunciation of the Ugaritic letter name could be *waqeyu*. The Hebrew letter name *waw* is made by doubling the consonant, and this may have happened at a very early stage since the Ugaritic letter name could not be used by Ugaritians and other Northwest Semites. I propose the meaning “veneration”.

Number 8. *z*.

The Hebrew letter name *zàyin* means “weapon” in post-biblical Hebrew. This word is not found in Biblical Hebrew and not in Ugaritic either. The meaning “weapon” could be interpreted as the lightning,

and the pictograms certainly look like lightening. The South-Arabic pictogram reminds us of the thunderbolts kept in the hand of weather gods like Hadad or Jupiter. Only few Ugaritic words begin with *z*, and if the word has to be parallel to the “Howler” from the last verse, there is only one *z*gw/z*gt*= “barking, roaring, crying out” following Aistleitner 887. In Arabic we have *za*gà* = “crying, outcrying”. In Hebrew the voiced velar fricative **g* is replaced by the voiced pharyngeal fricative *c*. The corresponding words are *zuca*= “tremble, quake”, *zecaqah*= “cry, outcry”, *zacak*= “storm, rage”. In Aramaic we have *zoca*= “stormwind”. The “crying” and “raging” in the poem probably comes from the thunder. In English the thunder is “pealing”, so the early letter name parallel to the “Howler” is the “Pealer”. We have to add a last consonant *-n* to the Ugaritic letter name *z*g[n]*. This is a normal way in Ugaritic to make personal names. For example *.spn*= Sapan the name of the holy mountain near Ugarit is made from *.sp*= “glance”. A pronunciation close to the Arabic would be *za*gani* with the genitive *-i*. The development from this name to *zàyin* could be the result of avoiding a difficult pronunciation. The verse of the last two letter names will be.

*[w]qy z*g[n]*

*waqeyu za*gani*

veneration of the Pealer

The parallelism appears in the two last verses, as the Howler and the Pealer are both names for the Weather God Hadad. In the first verse he is worshipped with food in the form of fuel for burnt-offering. In the last verse with the verbal praise of God. In a Ugaritic legend (KTU. 1.14: II,13-26.) king Keret is told to sacrifice a sheep, a lamb, a fowl and to sacrifice bread, wine, honey. Finally he must go to the top of the tower, raise his hands to heaven, The tower is the highest place of the roof mentioned likewise in the Old Testament as a place for praising and offering. At most offerings the meat was divided between the priests and the donator, in general the king at that time. The offerings were essential for keeping the Gods in a good mood, and consequently the society prosperous.



Figure 8. Scarab- seals from the area near Byblos. 1750 B.C.- 1550 B.C. (Keel and Uehlinger 1992)

Figure 8 shows scarab-seals from the area around Byblos. Many of the seals from this period show the Weather God. His lifted arm sometimes holds a club probably for making noise and hitting the clouds. We can see the rain as stripes on the edge of some scarabs and on his clothing. On some of the scarabs as in 8b, the soil is represented by the Goddess of the fertile soil, Asherat, and on this scarab we probably also see a crescent. In Figure 8a she is depicted as a fish with water stripes. The fertilisation is very often symbolised with a plant or a “tree of life”. We see the tree of life in Figure 8a and at 8c as a lotus flower.



Figure 9. Relief on a stele from Ugarit . 1400 B.C. to 1200 B.C. (Caquot Pl. 25)

In Ugarit the Weather God was the God of the City, and he had the names Hadad and Baal. Figure 9 shows a stele from Ugarit depicting Hadad. On his head he has two horns, symbolising his power. He has one hand lifted with a club. In the second hand he has a lance symbolising lightening. The rain in Canaan mainly comes with thunderstorms. The lance is partly a tree, that he plants. The little Goddess in front of Hadad at Figure 9 is standing on a podium. This could be a picture of a statue in the Temple, possibly of Asherat. Hadad's knife is touching her head and it may symbolise his penis, his fertilising power. Hadad has sex with Asherat, but normally his partner is her daughter Anat, verified in the text "Anat eats her brother(Hadad)" (KTU. 1.96). Later on in the Old Testament Yahweh= "the creator" has taken over the control of the weather. Yahweh has made the clouds his chariots (Ps.104,3), and makes the lightening flash (Ps. 97,4).

Number 9, .h.

The meaning of the Hebrew letter name *.het* is not known. There are many Ugaritic words with *h*, and in order to get some help we can look at the next Proto-Canaanite pictogram (number 10), the circle with a cross. This is known as the alchemical symbol for earth or matter. The symbol can be explained as the earth with four corners or four rivers from the paradise mountain (Gen.2.10). If we accept that letter number 10 means ground, earth or world, we now have to look for Ugaritic words with *h*, having something to do with ground. The five most reasonable words will now be discussed.

1. *.hzt*= "farm, court" according to Aistleitner 960. The corresponding Hebrew word is *.hàsir*= "courtyard". It is an opinion held by many, including Albright, that the Proto-Canaanite pictogram is a "fence", but the Ugaritic pictogram does not look like a "fence".

2. *.hrt*= "ploughing, cultivating, planting" according to Aistleitner 980. We have an example of the use of the root *hrt* when Baal is dead and there is a mourning for

bcl cnt m.hrtt "the Lord of the sources of the fields" (KTU 1.6,IV,3).

The prefix *m-* means "from". The suffix *-t* makes the word a noun meaning "what has been ploughed". The sources are the furrows, waiting for the seed and water from Baal. The Hebrew word is *.hari*s*= "plough, carve". Arabic *.harata*, Ethiopic *.hara*sa*, Syrian *.harat* and Akkadian *ere*su* all mean "planting". Another but close root is the Hebrew and Arabic *.h.t.t*= "make lines(furrows)" corresponding to Aramaic *htt*= "dig". It is possible that there was an Ugaritic word [*htt*]= "digging", but since it is not found yet in the Ugaritic literature we will have to do with *.hrt* instead.

3. *.htt*= "wheat" according to Aistleitner 914. Hebrew *.hi.t.tàh*= "wheat". Ethiopic *he.t.tat*= "grain".

4. *.hym/.hyt*= “life” according to Aistleitner 916. The first two consonants of the root *hy* gives the general idea of being alive and the third consonant is used for different aspects. This is a common Semitic way of forming words and we have seen it before at the last letter name where *zg* gives the general idea making noise. In Ugaritic the third consonant *-t* is normally used for forming abstracts. In Hebrew *.hayim*= “life” and *.hayah*= “live”

5. *.hwt*= “life, realm, dynasty” according to Gordon 850. and Aistleitner 911. This word is in principle the same as the former *.hyt* because *y* many times replaces the older *w*.

The last four possibilities do not agree with the fence. Instead the Proto-Canaanite pictogram can be explained as plough-furrows in the ground or rows of plants. One of the Proto-Canaanite pictograms looks like a twisted cord. This pictogram is only found in Sinai, and it is exactly the same as the Egyptian hieroglyph with phoneme *h*. Therefore this pictogram probably had another letter name than the Ugaritic. Here I propose the Hebrew *.hu.t* = “cord, line, thread” with the same meaning as the Arabic *ḥa.tun*. We have this word in “cotton”. The Ugaritic pictogram is probably a cross and the South-Arabic pictogram is almost identical. The vertical line could be a digging stick or a plough staff placed in the ground. The purpose is to cultivate and sow. The meaning of these four words are close to each other. We will have to see if any of them give an explanation of the letter names. Number 5 seems to come close to the Ethiopic letter name , but the *t* in *.hwt* is probably introduced for making an abstract and is different from the *.t* in *.haw.t*. *t* is a “voiced” *t* pronounced like the English word “at”. *ṭ* is a “wet” *t* pronounced like th in “think”. It seems to me that we have to choose number 2 *.hrṭ* because it gives the best explanation of the pictograms.. A pronunciation in Ugaritic close to the Ethiopian would be *.haraṭu*. The meaning is “ploughing”.

Number 10. *.t*

The meaning of the Hebrew letter name *.te.t* is unknown, but with the same root *.t.t* we have the word *.ti.t*= “mud, clay”. The meaning “mud” is prosaic but close to the meaning “ground” of the Proto-Canaanite pictogram. This could be a symbol of the earth or the cultivated land of the city state. The South-Arabic pictogram could be an acre. In the Ugaritic pictogram, we see two horizontal wedges forming the ground. Between them a vertical plant is growing. Some linguists have chosen the Hebrew name *.tirah*= “enclosure, encampment” and it is possible, that the Proto-Canaanite pictogram depicts a circular encampment. Albright chooses the meaning “spindle”. The following Ugaritic words have something to do with ground.

1. *.ti.t*= “clay” is found in Ugaritic (KTU 1.16 V ,30), but it begins with the wrong *t*.

2. *.t.hn*= “to grind” (KTU 1.6, II,34).

In Hebrew we have *.ta.hun*= “ground” and *.ta.han*= “to grind. The meaning of the early letter name is probably “soil”, because it benefits from the “plough” from the previous letter. Of the two words we have found with approximately the same meaning: “soil”, we choose *[.t]i.t* as the early letter name, because it comes closest to the known letter names. The pronunciation could be like the Ethiopic *.taiti*. The first consonant is a reconstruction. The two last letter names make the verse:

.hrṭ [ṭ]i.t *.haraṭu .tai.ti* ploughing of soil

The ploughing is the work of men, but the verse probably has a religious meaning too. We just read that Hadad is “the Lord of the sources of the fields” which means that he is the one who makes the ploughing and sowing successful and makes the plants grow.

Number 11. *y*.

The meaning of the Hebrew letter name *yod* is unknown, but with the same root *yd* we have the word *yad*= “hand, member, penis or power”. The meaning “penis” can be found in the Old Testament (Isa. 57,8). In Ugaritic the word *yd* can be found with the same meaning (KTU 1,10: III 7;23). The Proto-

Canaanite pictogram could be a shoulder with an arm, and it could be a penis with two testicles, but the resemblance is not good. I would like to know why this pictogram was introduced and preserved and propose that the model was the star constellation The Great Bear.



Figure 10. Cylinder seal from Ugarit. 1900 B.C.-1700 B.C. (Shaeffer-Forrer 1983, 25) and the seven stars of The Great Bear.

This constellation of seven stars is the most glaring in the sky, and it never descends. The constellation must have been known at all times. In the Ugaritic list of gods (Herdner 1978, 1, RS 24.264+280) seven Akkadian gods with the name Adad are listed with numbers from one to seven. In the list we can see the corresponding Ugaritic name: Baal. In Ugaritic the helpers of Baal are called his seven boars (KTU 1.5 V,8 f). The “Seven Stars” is used as a name and a picture symbol in Assyrian times about 700 B.C. even in Canaan. They are normally interpreted as the Pleiads, but it is very difficult to identify seven stars in the Pleiads. In my opinion, The Great Bear is a much better interpretation. I believe that in Canaan, the Great Bear was a symbol of the hands of God, whether his name was Baal or Yahweh. The cylinder seal in Figure 10 shows Hadad as we know him from Figure 9. He is facing another god, probably Mot= “death”, who has his hands tied on the back. We see the Crescent and the seven stars of The Great Bear. The Ugaritic pictogram has two hands and we have to find another interpretation. The letter name is in the singular in the Proto-Canaanite alphabet and in the plural in the Ugaritic alphabet. The early letter name is *ydm* in Ugaritic with the meaning “hands”. The pronunciation is *yadamu*.

Number 12. k.

The Hebrew letter name *kaf* means “hollow, palm, sole or spoon”. *Kef* means “cave” and this English word probably comes from the same root as *kef*. *Kuf* means “cavity”. In Ugaritic we have *kp* meaning “hand, pan of a scale” (KTU. 1,24: 35). The Arabic *kaff*= “palm, glove”. The Egyptian hieroglyph “the clenched hand” has the name “khefa” and personifies the female principle (Wilkinson 1992, 55). The Proto-Canaanite pictogram could be the fingers stretched out but could also be the pubic triangle. The Ugaritic pictogram could be a cave with an entrance on the left. I will choose the meaning “hollow”, because it is general. The pronunciation of the Ugaritic letter name *kp* could be *kafi*. The last two letter names make the verse:

ydm kp yadamu kafi hands of hollow

To understand the meaning of this verse, it is informative to read in the Old Testament that the word *kaf* is used of hands spread out in prayer, as a sign of longing to receive (Ex.9,29+33, 1K.8,38). The two arms are held forward with the palms upwards. This attitude of receiving from God explains the Ugaritic pictogram with the two hands. The parallelism of the last two verses comes from two actions from men creating a hollow for Hadad to fill. The idea was that the Weather God Hadad could make the plants grow. In an Ugaritic poem we hear that if Baal is alive “the heavens will rain oil, the brooks will flow with honey” (KTU.1,6.III,5-6,12-13). This picture shows that Hadad is responsible for the prosperity of the society. The strophe is an acknowledgement of his power.

*Number 13. *s.*

The two Ugaritic phonemes number 13 *s and number 25 *t* have in Hebrew been combined in the phoneme *s. This is because Hebrew, like Akkadian, does not have the interdental spirant *t* found in English “thin” and Arabic *t* (Segert 1984, 32). However, the Hebrew phoneme *s has taken the place of *t* in the Alphabet. Number 13 has no Proto-Canaanite pictogram and the Proto-Canaanite pictogram of number 25 is the ancestor of the Hebrew symbol for *s. The Hebrew name of the letter *s is *sin and with the same root we have *sen= “tooth”. In Ugaritic we have *sn= “tooth” according to Aistleitner 2647, corresponding to Arabic *sinn. But this Ugaritic word can also have the meaning “shine” (KTU. 1.96,1). In a short ritual text “Anat eats her brother(Hadad)” we hear that Anat is “shining”. The Arabic *sana means “to shine” and Ethiopic *senn= “beauty”. Another Semitic word in this relation is the Ugaritic *snt=“year” corresponding to Hebrew *sana and Arabic *sanat. These words are articulated by exposure of the teeth and a fizzing sound (of fire?). The age of the root is seen by the similarity of the Indo-European word “shine”. When we decide the meaning of the letter name we have to use the information from the pictogram at the following letter number 14. We have learned from letter number 5, that the three vertical wedges in a horizontal row means fire. “Shine” or “beauty” are the best in relation to “fire”, but “teeth” could also be used. When we look at the Ugaritic pictogram, it looks like three rays from one point and thus supports the meaning “shine”. The pronunciation could be *sennu..

Number 14. l.

The meaning of the Hebrew letter name *lamed* is not known but with the same root we have the word *lemed*= “learning”. This meaning does not fit very well with the meaning “fire” of the Ugaritic pictogram. It is a common opinion that the Proto-Canaanite pictogram represents an oxdriver-stick. In my opinion the sticks in the pictograms are too bent to be of any use. Furthermore, the Ugaritic pictogram would be difficult to explain as oxdriver-sticks. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram looks very much like a flame. The South-Arabic pictogram belongs to the family of different L-symbols and could easily depict a flame or a torch. When we look for Hebrew words with *l*- meaning fire, we find *lahat*= “flame, heat” and *lahav*= “flame”. In Ugaritic we find *la smm* = “burning of heaven” (KTU. 1,3.V,18) describing the situation when Hadad has no temple, probably meaning that there are no clouds. In Arabic *laalaa* means “shine, glow” and *lamba* means “lamp”. Assyrian *la abu* means “flame. In Ethiopic *lahaba* means “burn” and *lahb* means “flame, heat”. The last word comes very near to the Ethiopic letter name *lawe*. The Greek *lampas*= “torch, light” survives in the English word “lamp”. When we look at the Assyrian and Ethiopic versions, we can reconstruct the Ugaritic letter name *la[b]* with the possible pronunciation *laavi* and the meaning “flame”. The last two letter names make the verse:

*sn *la[b]* *sennu *laavi* shine of flame

This verse is exceptional by having no parallelism with other verses. It is reasonable that the letter numbers 13 and 14 are special, because these two letter numbers correspond to the days of the Full Moon. The Moon waxes approximately the first twelve days of the month. Then come two days, number 13 and 14, of Full Moon. The Waning Moon takes approximately twelve days. Finally come three or four days without Moon, depending on if the month has 29 or 30 days. On the two days of Full Moon, the Moon is impressive and shines the most. We also have to keep in mind that the Moon shines the whole night through only on these two days. This is because the Full Moon is in a position opposite the Sun. In religious terms this means that at the time of Full Moon, you always see God’s light. This time of the month is the best for outdoor festivals for the whole community in the night. All over the world without electric light the night of the Full Moon has been used for outdoor parties. The verse probably refers to a religious festival.

The full Moon is worshipped with burnt-offerings by the Jews. In Exodus, the Pesach ritual including the burnt-offering is prescribed to take place on the night before the 14th day in the first month of the year (Exodus 12,6; 12,10). That is the night of the full Moon: “And you are not allowed to leave anything from it (the animal) for the next morning; but what is left over in the morning, you must burn on a fire.” Even to day this tradition is alive, when Jews have a burned bone on their Pesach table, where the dish probably symbolises an altar.

From the Ugaritic offering lists we know that many oxen, goats and other animals were offered in the

temple. Probably all animals from the neighbourhood, including the king's palace, had to be slaughtered in the temple. The longest list of offerings for one day is on the fourteenth day (KTU. 1.109,1-5), (Herdner 1978, 16-21). The first five lines are

<i>barbct . c*srt[t]</i>	The fourteenth
<i>yrt.h.s . mlk b[rr]</i>	he washes himself the king the pure
<i>bym . mlat</i>	On the day of the complete (Moon)
<i>tqln . alpm</i>	they fall down the oxen
<i>yrh . c*srt . lbc[l . .spn]</i>	month of ten , for Baal Sapon

In line five, we have the Ugaritic word *c*srt* like in line one, where it means “tenth”. Therefore it is possible that it means month number ten. In line three, I choose the word “complete” instead of Herdners “consecration” because of the Hebrew word *malea*= “full, complete”. “Baal Sapon” is the local weather god called after the great mountain of Sapon near Ugarit. The following lines in the Ugaritic text is a very long list of sacrificed animals of many kind and the respective beneficial gods. Line 30-31 says: “Thirty generous portions of sheep for the fellowship. On the table of the Goddess of the houses.”

Number 15. *m*.

The meaning of the Hebrew name *mem* with the root *mm* is not clear, but with *m* we have the Hebrew word *màyim*= “water”. In Hebrew the name is only found in the plural, but in Aramaic we find *maya*= “water”. The Ethiopic letter name *may* means “water”. In Ugaritic we have *my*= “water” (KTU. 1.19:II,6). The pronunciation in Ugaritic may have been like the Aramaic. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram obviously shows water. The Ugaritic pictogram is more difficult to explain. The horizontal wedge at the very top makes us look for water on a high level. The highest water we can think of is the sky. We have mentioned the heavenly sea in connection with the creation of the world in the first verse. Now the fresh water from heaven seems to come into function, because there is a vertical wedge in the pictogram. The water comes down as rain and dew, but we also have to take into consideration the common myth about a paradise mountain, where gods live and where some rivers have their source. This tradition is known in China, India, Mesopotamia, Greece and Scandinavia but we will only quote from the Old Testament (Gen.2.10): “Now there was a river flowing out of Eden for watering of the garden, and from there it divided itself and became four mainstreams”. The meaning of the early letter name clearly is “water”. We choose *my* as the early letter name and the pronunciation *mayu*.

Number 16. *d*.

There is no Hebrew or Ethiopic letter name. The Ugaritic phoneme *d* is pronounced like the “th” in the English “this” and is not used in Hebrew (Segert 1984). The Hebrew *z* has taken over this phoneme and that's where we have to look for a Hebrew version of the letter name. So far only few Ugaritic words with *d* have been translated and the only one connected with water is *drq*= “sprinkle” (KTU. 1.5, I,6). We know that water was used in the temple for purification, and this was done by sprinkling water. In the offering lists it is registered that the king washes himself. This happens on different days of the month. See line two in the text cited above at letter number 14. The Hebrew word *zaraq*= “sprinkle” is used in Ezekiel 36,25, where Jahweh says: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be pure.” Even to day, orthodox Jews must wash their hands before every meal. They pour water at one hand at a time. Then they raise the wet hands and recite the benediction: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hath sanctified us by His Commandments and hath commanded us concerning the washing of the hands” (Ganzfried 1961, Chapter 40). Arabic *daraqae* means “throwing”. Ethiopic *zaraa* means “scatter, sow”. The Ugaritic symbol I would explain as “one hand washing the other” or “water poured on an arm”. The South-Arabian and the Proto-Canaanite pictogram probably have a different explanation. Here I suggest that the pictogram shows furrows in a field, like the Proto-Canaanite pictogram number 9. The South-Arabian letter name could be *daraq* = “sowing”. We have to keep in

mind that the order of the letters is different from the Ugaritic order, and that the other letter names do not necessarily have a relation to water. The Ugaritic letter name is *drq*= “sprinkle and the pronunciation could be *daraq*. Now we have the verse:

my drq màyu daraq water of sprinkling.

The water in this verse is used for sprinkling, which means that there is water in the temple and the water is holy. The cleaning and washing has a hygienic effect and gives comfort, but the real purpose of the ritual washing is to bring the person in another holy or sacred state by getting in close contact with the God. The idea of ritual washing and purification is essential in the Canaanite religion. It is also an important element in Jewish religion. Orthodox Jews have strict rules for the purification of women after menstruation (Ganzfried 1961, Chapter 153-156). They have to have a special bath in rainwater and they are not allowed to have intercourse for seven days. Probably the Jewish tradition of ritual washing is the origin of the Christian holy water and the Christian baptism.

The water for sprinkling coming from the heavenly sea must belong to some deity. We have seen in connection with the first verse, that the water was not the dominion of El. That leaves us with only one possibility: Asherat, the mother of the gods. From the Ugaritic mythological texts it is clear that Asherat had the highest authority together with El, and they were a couple. It is now generally accepted that the goddess was widely worshipped in Canaan until the Exile (Handy 1994, 72). Her Ugaritic title *rbt atrt ym* has mostly been translated “Lady Asherat of the Sea”, but Binger finds it more probable with the translation “Lady Asherat of the Day” (Binger 1997, 42). I would say that both are right. The sea here is the sky, and the light sky is the day. The two Hebrew words *yam* and *yom* both mean “sea”; one is the lower and one is the upper sea. In Ugaritic and Phoenician the two words have the same spelling *ym*. The Hebrew word for “heaven” **samayim* is interesting because the prefix **sa* means “also” and *mayim* means “water”, i.e. the sky is made of water. When Asherat is the sky, she is able to overlook and protect everybody. Probably her name is related to Akkadian *a*sarum*= “to survey, overlook or take care of, bring luck, advance” (Binger 1997, 143). All the fresh water originally comes from heaven. Asherat is the power in the water that can bring life and health to all living organisms. She is represented in any plant and therefore one of her symbols was a tree, the tree of life. The tree of life has a world wide and prolonged existence. In other places than Canaan, the goddess has other names or no name at all, but the general idea of the tree of life must be the same everywhere.

The tree of life in Canaanite iconography is sometimes a stylised tree of life with seven branches. It is a cedar tree, which is evergreen, and therefore represents the everlasting life. The Jewish seven-stemmed chandelier, *Menorah* is probably inspired by this tree. The prefix *Men-* means “from” and *orah* means “the light”. So the light of the candle comes from a greater light, like the heavenly light from the sky. Yahweh has explained the design of Menorah in details to Moses (Ex. 25,31-40): A number of flowers and buds made of gold is prescribed on the different arms. The seven lamps must be on a line. To day the Menorah may only be used for solemnities in the synagogue.



Figure 11. Scarab seals from South Palestine. 1750 B.C.- 1550 B.C. Keel and Uehlinger 1992, 31-32)

In Figure 11 we see three representations of the goddess of vegetation, presumably Asherat. In Figure 11a, she wears only a necklace and holds a tree in each hand. Trees are also growing from her pubic

triangle. In b, we have a tree of life surrounded by two worshippers. Above is the Egyptian hieroglyph “gold”, probably meaning that the goddess brings wealth. Above the worshippers are mountains and above them falcons with crowns. The falcons symbolise the power of heaven and they protect the queen of heaven. At the top, we see the queen’s head. The enlarged ears may symbolise her capacity of listening to prayers. The three leaves at the top of her head is a symbol for vegetation. The two cobra snakes below her head will be explained below. In c we only have the tree of life and cobra snakes.

We will have to investigate if there is a special relation between the 15th day of the month and the Goddess of the sky and water. In Babylon, the Goddess Ishtar was worshipped on the 15th day of the month. The 15th is also the beginning of the Jewish festival Sukkah, one of the three important rituals of the Year. In the Old Testament we read (Lev.23,34+ 40+ 42+ 43): ”On the 15th day of this seventh month it is booth festival for seven days. And on the first day you shall collect fruit from splendid trees, palm leaves, branches from tight trees and poplar from the rainflood valley. You shall live in booths for seven days. All the natives of Israel shall live in booths. For generations by you to know, that I let the sons of Israel live in booths, when I guided them out of Egypt. I am Jahweh your God.” The memory of the escape from Egypt is probably a later rationalisation of an old Canaanite religious festival connected with water and sky. Even to day orthodox Jews have to sleep seven days in booths covered with green branches. Strict rules for the sky to be visible through the roof indicates that the booth dwelling is an honouring of the sky. Three kinds of branches plus fruit (lemons) bound together is called Lulav = “palm leaf” and every male Jew has to bring a Lulav to the synagogue and shake it at the Succah festival. The Lulav ritual seems to be a reminiscence of the praising of vegetation: “the tree of life”.

More information about the religious practice in the temple of Jerusalem can be found in the Mishnah, written as early as the second century A.D. In the Succah there is water libation at the altar and benedictions of rain at the altar. One report (Danby 1950, Succah 5,1-4) says: “The flute-playing, sometimes five and sometimes six days- this is the flute-playing at the Beth ha Sheubah (=“the place of water drawing”), ... At the close of the first Festival-day of the Feast they went down to the court of the women where they have made a great amendment. There were golden candlesticks there with four golden bowls on top of them... and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of Beth ha Sheubah. Men of piety and good works used to dance before them with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises. And countless Levites on harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and instruments of music... They went on until they reached the gate that leads out to the east.” Jirku also tells (Jirku 1966) how the Sukkah was celebrated in Jerusalem: “Large Processions went from the Temple to the Gihon Creek in the Kidron Valley, the water supply for the city. They had flute-music and brought willow branches, and water to the alter. They prayed for water”.

The Pesach which lasts for seven days is called Chag ha Matsot (= “the feast of the unleavened breads”) and it begins on the 15th of the month like the seven days of the Sukkah. At the Pesach there will be benedictions for rain and a priest has to wave sheaves in front of the altar (Lev. 23, 10-11). The Jewish festivals on the 15th of the month are definitely connected with water, plants and sky, and they are probably inherited from ancient Canaanite traditions. We have some indirect information from the offering lists about the religious cult in Ugarit. From the offering list KTU 1.41= CTA 35 in De Moor’s translation (de Moor 1972, 13-18) we learn: In the month of “First of the Wine” there was a festival. Notice that this month is at the same time as the Succah. On the day of the New Moon, grapes are offered to El. On the thirteenth day the king washes himself. On the fourteenth day the king is purifying himself again and he calls upon the Day (*ym*). The following day when the *gml* (Moon?) has disappeared, a long list of offerings are given to different gods including a ram for Asherat. This was still the 14th day of the month. At the first day of the festival (the 15th day of the month) the temple rate which the daughter of the king shall take along is a sacrifice, oil, myrrh, oil with perfume, honey, a grain offering and a town pigeon and two unseasoned breads. And into the mountain: fourteen jars of wine, a measure (*prs*) of flour. The steps of the altar of the house of the goddess two birds. These offerings of liquids, grain and birds are suitable for the Goddess of sky and water. It is natural that she was worshipped on the mountain, but she evidently even had a temple. The next six festival days are listed with their activities. Most offerings are for goddesses called *ilh*= “female god” or *ilhm*= “gods” or Mistress of the Mansion or Goddess of the House or Asherat (at the 4th and the 5th day of the festival). Later in the text we learn that on the roof of the temple there are four by four dwellings of cut-off foilage. This Ugaritic text is probably an example

of the traditional Canaanite autumn festival that we now know as the Jewish Succah. To my knowledge Asherat only appears in five other Ugaritic offering lists and only in one of them is the date readable (KTU. 1,112, 22-24), (Herdner 1978, 23): “On the fifteenth (day) sacrifices: El, a sheep; Baal Sapan, a sheep; Baal Ugarit, a sheep; for Asherat, two sheeps”. In another offering list (Herdner 1978, 42, RS 24.291,2-3) we can read: “On the 19th day the bed of Pdry is dressed with the kings bedclothes”. Pdry is the goddess of honey dew and daughter of Asherat. This text probably means that the king has to sleep outside on the top of the temple at night just like in Succah.

In Ugarit, women seem to have a special contact with water. Apparently it was the task of a woman to wash her husband before they went to bed. The god Athar complains bitterly that he has no wife to wash him, so he has to make do with male servants (KTU. 1.2, III,20 ff). The offering lists show that the queen offered wine for Asherat. Even to day the young women go to the well to fetch the water for the household in the Near East.

Number 17. n.

The meaning of the Hebrew letter name *nun* is not known, but with the same root we have *nin*= “propagate”. The Ethiopic letter name is *na.ha*s*= “snake, serpent”. Gardiner (Gardiner 1916) was the first to identify the Proto-Canaanite pictogram as a snake on the basis of the Ethiopic letter name. Hebrew *na.ha*s*= “serpent, divination, hydromancy”, and Arabic *na.hi*su* means “serpent, be unlucky”. The Ugaritic pictogram is a reasonable way to show a snake crawling on the ground. We have to notice that single horizontal lines means invisible in the Ugaritic pictograms number 1 and number 27. So the snake here in number 17 is probably a spiritual snake. In Ugaritic (KTU. 1,100: 74) we find *n.h*sm*= “snakes”. The Ugaritic word *n.h* means “to move” according to Aistleitner 1767. Hebrew *na.hah* means “lead, guide”. The Semitic suffix *-*s* is used for making an adverb giving the root *n.h*s* = “guiding, a guide”. This explains the meaning “divination”. The Hebrew letter name *nun* is made by consonant doubling and has replaced the early letter name at a later stage when a meaning “serpent” of the letter name could be disturbing. The pronunciation of the early letter name could be *na.h*su*.

Number 18. .z.

There is no Hebrew or Ethiopic letter name. The emphasised *.z* is not used in Hebrew and we have to look for words beginning with *z*, that have replaced *.z*. Like letter number 16, only few Ugaritic words begin with *.z*. Only one word *.zqr*= “bright” or “pure” (KTU 1.24; 21) is meaningful in connection with the last letter name “serpent”. In Hebrew we have *zohar*= “brightness”. Another spelling is *tohar*= “cleanness”. A related word is *zok*= “purity”. *zikuch*= “purifying”, *zaqam*= “to raise”. Arabic *zahra*, *zahara* = “shine”. We are here talking of purification of the inside of the body and the mind. The Ugaritic pictogram is difficult to expound. We will see below, that the two horizontal wedges above each other in the Ugaritic pictogram of letter number 21 *p* is a mouth. The symbol here at letter number 18, looks like somebody showing his tongue to someone, probably to show that the tongue is clean. It is then a symbol for a pure body and soul. The pronunciation of the letter name *.zhr* could be *.zahari*. Now we have the verse

*n.h*s .zhr na.h*su .zahari serpent of brightness*

It is probable that the serpent in this verse refers to a live serpent or a serpentsculpture in the temple. Such a serpent could have had a role in the divinations of the temple. Note that the temple in Delphi with the famous oracle had a serpent. From the Old Testament we know that the serpent was worshipped by some Canaanites even after the introduction of the monotheistic Jahweh religion. This can be seen from the Old Testament (2 Kings 18,4): “He (king Hezekiah) had the high places removed, and he crushed the images and he cut the Asherah and he broke into pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for until these days, the sons of Israel had burned incense to it and they called it Nechushtan”. Asherah is the Hebrew name of the Ugaritic Asherat, and here it probably means a wooden post. The first part of the serpent’s name is the letter name *nahas*. Serpents can be seen on a scarab together with Hadad in Figure 8c. In Figure 9b, the two serpents are placed beside the head of Asherat. In Figure 9c, the four serpents are added to the tree of life. The parallelism of the two last verses appears from the holy water and the

serpent both being implements of the temple and used for some kind of purification.

However we have to find the deeper meaning of the serpent symbol. The serpent in Paradise was connected with wisdom and spiritual power. The serpents can find the hidden ways in narrow dark places, where they live. If we conceive any stream as a serpent, the wisdom of the stream is where to go. The serpent can see clearly. In Egypt the Pharaoh's and gods very often have a serpent sitting on their forehead to show that they see everything clearly. This can even be seen on a cylinder seal from Ugarit Figure 12.



Figure 12. Cylinder seal from Ugarit. About 1600 B.C.-1500 B.C. (Shaeffer-Forrer 1983, 17)

We see here the heavenly queen probably Asherat riding on her donkey with a serpent on her forehead. The serpents we talk about here are not only biological snakes but invisible spiritual forces present in any stream of water or other movements looking like serpents moving. The hidden streams inside the body like blood, heat, liquids and thoughts are likewise under the control of the serpents. Purity inside is what we call health, and this is probably an aspect of the “brightness” in the verse. The serpent symbol is very old and world-wide. We often see two serpents twined around each other; one is giving life, the other one is taking life. Sometimes they have horns. Even to day the Caduceus sceptre with two serpents is a symbol of the medical profession.

The serpent symbol can probably be used of several deities but the serpent in the verse is probably related to Asherat. This is because the serpent is present in streams of water. Another reason is that the goddess of the clear sky can see everything. The last two verses have parallelism because both verses tells us about the gifts from the supreme goddess Asherat of the Sky, the first one the life-giving water and the second one the wisdom or insight. Another deity to consider is the Ugaritic goddess Shapash the daughter of Asherat. Shapash lives in her mother's house and helps her. However the serpent is a symbol for brightness or clearness and not for light.

Number 19. s.

The Hebrew letter name *sàmek* does not have a clear meaning, but with the same root we have *sèmek*= “to support, sustain”. Of the few Ugaritic words with *s*, the most meaningful to me is *sad*= “to serve, pay respect” (KTU 1.17,V,30), and this agrees very well with the Ethiopic letter name *saat*. There is only a minor change in pronunciation and meaning from this Ugaritic word to the Hebrew *sad*= “to support, eat, feed” and Arabic *saida*= “aid, assist”. The Ugaritic pictogram could be interpreted as a cup of a goddess like the one she holds in Figure 10. A cup could be used for libations. Liquids such as wine, water, milk or oil was served mostly to the female deities, for example at the “Ugaritic Succah” referred to above at letter number 15. The South-Arabic pictogram could be interpreted as a temple with smoke. The Phoenician letter symbol is a vertical pillar, at the upper end crossed by three horizontal lines. This symbol resembles the Egyptian hieroglyph the “Djed pillar” (Wilkinson 1992, 165) meaning “stability”. The pillar seems to be made of reeds or sheaves and has four shelves. It is depicted beside pictures of some of the Egyptian Gods. At Canaanite seals we see similar pictures of altar tables together with Gods and worshippers (Keel and Uehlinger 1992). The number of shelves can be two or more. Some Jews still use trays with several floors at their ritual banquets. We will assume that the Phoenician letter symbol is



Figure 13 a. Bronze pendant from Akko. b. Clay figurine from Revadim . 1750 B.C.- 1550 B.C. (Keel and Uehlinger 1992).

Number 21. *p*

The Hebrew letter name *pe* means “mouth, opening”. The Ethiopic letter name *af* also means “mouth”. All the pictograms here can be interpreted as an open mouth. In the Ugaritic text (KTU 1,4: VII.20), when Baal opens a window in the roof of his temple, he follows the mouth *p* of the architect, which means the advice from the architect. When Anat and Hadad have intercourse (KTU 1.10, III,10), *p* is a metaphor for her vagina. The early letter name could be *p*, but we have to consider other Ugaritic words derived from *p*. *pid*= “mind, kindness” Gordon 1996. *pnm*= “face” Gordon 2064. *pcr*= “to proclaim, call” Gordon 2078 corresponding to the Arabic *fa*gara* and the Hebrew *pacar* both meaning “open the mouth wide”. When we remember that the letter name should be parallel to “serving” from the last verse, I suggest “proclaiming” as the best choice. The pronunciation could be *pacaru*.

Number 22. *s*

The Hebrew letter name *.sade* and the Ethiopic letter name *.saday* have no clear meanings. Beginning with the same two consonants we have Hebrew *.sèdeq*= “righteousness” and *.sadiq*= “holy man, rabbi”. In Ugaritic *.sdq*= “righteousness”, but in one offering text the abstract concept is personified as a deity (KTU 1.123:14). We don’t know much about this goddess “the Righteous”, but because of parallelism in the alphabet poem, the name is probably another name for Anat. The Ugaritic pictogram has only two vertical wedges beside each other. I suggest that they show the two lifted arms of a righteous person who is praising a god. Even to day Jews hold their arms like that and bend forward while they make benedictions in the synagogue. Muslims lying on their knees also lift their arms before they bend down to the floor. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram looks like the fringes that orthodox Jews still wear under a piece of cloth in a way that they can be seen, because it is written (Deu. 22,12), (Ganzfried 1961, Chapter 6) “Thou shalt make thyself fringes”. These fringes are called *.sit.sit*= “tassel, fringe”. The purpose of wearing the fringes is obviously to show to God and people that you are righteous. The Proto-Canaanite pictograms looking like plants have only been found in Sinai, and the letter name could have been another one like the Hebrew *.samah*= “sprout”. The South-Arabic pictogram could be explained as a combination of the South-Arabic symbol 9 “ground” and 11 “Gods hand” and perhaps it has the letter name “righteous”. The next verse becomes

pcr .sdq

pacaru .sadaqi

proclaiming of the Righteous

The meaning of the verse is that the Goddess should be called by her name, praised and asked for help. The last two verses are parallel because “the Source” and “the Righteous” are just two names for the goddess Anat. The first verse deals with the material worshipping, the second verse deals with the verbal worshipping. When we compare this strophe with the second strophe of the alphabet poem, dealing with the worshipping of Hadad, we see a perfect symmetry.

Number 23. *q*

The Hebrew letter name *qof* means “monkey”, but some scholars have suggested the early letter name *quf*= “eye of needle”. We have to use the information from the next letter number 24, where the Proto-Canaanite pictogram means “head”, and exclude “monkey” and “eye of needle”. In Ugaritic we have the following words with the two consonants *qp* the Hebrew letter name *pe* means “mouth, opening”. The Ethiopic letter name *af* also means “mouth”. All the pictograms here can be interpreted as an open mouth. In the Ugaritic text (KTU 1,4: VII.20), when Baal opens a window in the roof of his temple, he follows the mouth *p* of the architect, which means the advice from the architect. When Anat and Hadad have intercourse (KTU 1.10, III,10), *p* is a metaphor for her vagina. The early letter name could be *p*, but we have to consider other Ugaritic words derived from *p*. *pid*= “mind, kindness” Gordon 1996. *pnm*= “face” Gordon 2064. *pcr*= “to proclaim, call” Gordon 2078 corresponding to the Arabic *fagara* and the Hebrew *pacar* both meaning “open the mouth wide”. When we remember that the letter name should be parallel to “serving” from the last verse, I suggest “proclaiming” as the best choice. The pronunciation could be *pacaru*.or *qb*:

1 *qbr*= “to bury” Aistleitner 2387. This root probably means “to cover”. Notice the similarity to the English word “cover”. Ethiopic *qabara*= “bury”. Akkadian *qabaru*= “bury”.

2 *qpt* according to Aistleitner 2433 meaning some kind of container. Arabic *quffat*= “basket” and Akkadian *quppu*= “container”. We may compare to the Hebrew *qowa* = “helmet”, a cover for the head.

3 *qbct* = “cup” Aistleitner 2385 corresponding to Hebrew *qoobayat*= “cup”. Also a “cover”.

The second possibility “helmet” is possible because Anat was a War Goddess. Nevertheless my choice for the early letter name is *qbr* = “burial”. One reason is that this word is found in Ugaritic. But the primary reason is parallelism to the next verse. The Ugaritic pictogram could be something moving down in the earth. The other pictograms have a circle with a line beneath. The circle could be the cover of the tomb and the line could represent the spirit of the buried person. The pronunciation could be *qavaru*.

Number 24. *r*

The Hebrew letter name *re*s* has no immediate meaning but the word *ro*s* with the same root means “head, leader, first, beginning, front”. Other Semitic languages have the same root, but some of them with other vowels like Akkadian *re*su*, Ethiopic *ree*s* and Aramaic *re*sa*. In Ugaritic we have *r i*s*= “head, head of a group, the first” according to Gordon 2296. The Proto-Canaanite pictograms are obviously human heads. The Ugaritic pictogram does not look like a head, but it could look like a small group of persons moving to the right. So the “head” here means “head of the group” or “the first”. The pronunciation could be *ree*si*. The verse will be

*qbr ri*s*

qavaru

*ree*si*

burial of the first

The group of people depicted at the Ugaritic pictogram number 24 *r* is probably the community of the city-state and the head is the one who goes ahead to the dead and has to be buried. It is possible that the priest of the temple was involved in funeral rituals. In Ugarit and other parts of Canaan, the tombs of the dead were under the houses of the living (Dietrich et al. 1976, 45-52). In the tomb there were jars with holes in the bottom used for libations. There was a tube from the tomb leading to the upper floor. The tube is normally said to have the purpose that the living didn't have to go down in the tomb for the

libation. I doubt this explanation. The primary purpose of the tube is to give passage for the dead spirit. From the Ugaritic texts we know that the dead spirits took part in ritual banquets with their living descendants (KTU. 1.22,II), (de Moor 1972, 12). The so called “spirit-holes” are known from many stone-age and bronze-age cultures. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram probably shows the cover of a tomb with a spirit-tube. The deeper meaning of the verse as well as the funeral rites is probably that the deity takes care of the dead. In the Ugaritic poem “Baal’s fight with Mot” we see how Anat takes care of the deceased Hadad. She is lamenting, cutting herself in the face, burying him in the grave of the gods and sacrificing many animals (KTU,1,6. I,1-29). Any funeral may be experienced as a repetition of this first model. Two other lines in the same poem indicate that Anat is the Goddess of Death and of Birth:

“She seized divine-one Mot”.

“Flesh-piece connects to flesh-piece” (KTU, 1,6. II, 31+37), (Margalit 1980, 158)

The first line shows that Anat and not Hadad is doing the killing of Mot. The next line shows that she is able to recover Hadad and Mot. We see that some kind of resurrection or reincarnation may have been possible in the Canaanite religion.

Number 25. *ṭ*

Above at letter number 13 *s*, we have explained that Hebrew does not have the phoneme *ṭ*. It has been replaced with **s*, but the Hebrew letter **s* still has the original place of *ṭ* in the alphabet. We have used the letter name **sin* = “shine, tooth” for the letter **s*. Now we have to find another letter name in Ugaritic beginning with *ṭ*. Albright thinks it is *ṭann* = “composite bow” (Albright 1966). I don’t think this theory is very likely in the religious context we have here and I have found another word in Ugaritic *ṭd* = “breast, mountains”. Hebrew **sad* means “breast”. Akkadian **sadu* means “mountain”. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram really looks like two breasts. There are two alternative Ugaritic pictograms. One is small and I think it represents a “teat” (note the English word) of a breast. The other one looks like a female breast seen from the side. The South-Arabian pictogram is a construction of two circles, that might be two breasts or maybe two mountains. The pronunciation could be *ṭadu*. The Ethiopic letter name *sawt* seems to have preserved some of this pronunciation.

Number 26. **g*

Here we have no Hebrew or Ethiopic letter names. The phoneme **g* is the voiced counterpart of *ḥ* and is used in Arabic but only by a small group of Sephardic Jews (Segert 1984, 31). The Hebrew substitute for the letter number 26 **g* is letter number 20 *c*. In Ugaritic we have few words with **g*, and connected with “breast” only one **glm*/**glmt* = “boy/girl Aistleitner 2150. The corresponding Hebrew words are *calemah* = “young woman”, *cèlem* = “young man” and *calumim* = “youth”. Arabic **gulam* means “boy”. Since the breast is for both sexes we might as well construct the plural Ugaritic form in construct case **glm* = “children” or “youth”. There are two alternative Ugaritic pictograms and a South-Arabian pictogram, and they may all be explained as the offspring hanging on to their mother somehow. The next verse will be “breast of youth”, but this could be misunderstood because the real meaning is “suckle of youth”. Another solution is “brest for youth”.

*ṭd *glm ṭadu *galumu breast for youth.*

The breast is a symbol for compassion and charity for nourishing and bringing up, and it is not restricted to babies. The naked breasts are very often shown on pictures of the Goddess. In Figure 12 b, we see two young persons sucking a bosom. They represent the growing youth of the city state protected and nourished by the Goddess Anat. She is nourishing all animals and human beings. In Ugaritic we read that the Goddess Anat is the *ṭd* = “breast” of the nations (KTU.1.13: 19-22). The goddess in Figure 12 a is not suckling, but the way she lifts up the Lotus plant gives the impression that she cares about the living beings. It is possible that the priest of the temple took part in some kind of rituals for the new born, introducing them in society and giving them clothes and name. The two last verses are parallel because they describe how the Goddess is concerned about the life and death of living beings. In the first verse she

is the protector of the old dying people and their funeral. In the last verse she shows her compassion for the youth symbolised by her breast.

We have to make a conclusion about the structure of the part of the poem examined until now. The last strophe refers to matters for which Anat is responsible. This strophe is symmetric to the third strophe which refers to matters for which Hadad is responsible. The last 12 letter names that we have found correspond to the Waning Moon and make three strophes. All three deal with goddesses, the first with Asherat and the last two with Anat. Asherat is the supreme goddess who has the authority over the whole material world. Anat is the goddess with authority over the people of the city state. When we compare the part of the poem corresponding to the Waning Moon with the part corresponding to the Waxing Moon we see a complete symmetry in form and subject-matter. Only Asherat corresponds to El, the supreme God, and Anat corresponds to Hadad, the Weather God.

Number 27. *t*

The Hebrew letter name *taw* means “mark, sign”. The Proto-Canaanite pictogram is a simple cross, probably the most common mark used by man. This is the same for the South-Arabian pictogram. The Ugaritic pictogram is a single mark in the Ugaritic writing direction from left to right. The meaning “mark” seems to be perfect, but unfortunately the root *tw* has not been found in Ugaritic. In Ugaritic we have:

1. *thm*= “message” (KTU. 1,3: III,13 f.). The suffix *-m* designates the plural. In Akkadian *tahumu* means “border”. The Ugaritic letter name could have been *th*.
2. *twr*= “turn”, Gordon 2539. Akkadian *tàru*= “turn”. Hebrew *tor*=“ turn, plait, opportunity”.

Of these, number 2 is closest to the Ethiopic letter name *tawe*, and the meaning. For this letter and the next three letters we have very little information from the pictograms and the letter names. Instead we will use the information that the last four letters of the poem correspond to the period when the Moon is invisible and the New Moon appears. Therefore I choose number 2 “turn”. The word must be very old, since it is found in both Germanic and Semitic language. The English “turn” has the meanings “to rotate” or “chance” just like the Hebrew word. The Ugaritic word probably had the same two meanings. The Ugaritic pictogram is a single wedge and like in letter number 3 this could designate the Moon. But now the Moon is turned, and lying down, invisible. Horizontal lines means invisible according to the Ugaritic pictograms number 1 and number 17. The pronunciation could be *tawru*.

Number 28. *i*

There are no Hebrew or Ethiopic letter names. We have to look for a Ugaritic word beginning with *i*:

1. *ib*= a lunar goddess Ibbu married to the lunar god Yarikh. Gordon 10.
2. *imr*= “lamb”. Gordon 231.
3. *i*st*= “fire”. Gordon 231.
4. *it*= “exists”. Gordon 421. Hebrew only *i*s*= “man” and *e*s*= “being, existence, fire”.

Probably all these words could have some justification, but like before I will choose the word with relation to the Moon number 1. In the Ugaritic poem about the marriage of the Moon the first line introduces the bride:

*a*sr nkl wib*

I will sing about Nikkal the Vigorous (KTU. 1,24,1.)

Nikkal = “the great Lady” is the wife of the Babylonian Moon-God Sin. Nikkal is presented here as the daughter of “the king of the summer fruit”, which probably means that she is a full-bodied young

woman. The Hebrew *eb* means “bud, fresh green”. Akkadian *enbu* means “fruit, sexual power”. Arabic *abb* means “freshness”. The pronunciation could be *ebbi*. The meaning is a young woman able to be pregnant and give birth and I will choose “the Vigorous”. When we look at the Ugaritic pictogram, we can see the three horizontal wedges above each other, and we know from letter number 6, that this means the Weather God, Hadad. Below the wind we see a little vertical wedge, and this single wedge could be the symbol of the Moon, which we know from letter number 3 and 27. The little wedge here is only a seed fertilised by the Weather God. Then the verse of the last two letter names is:

twr ib tawru ebbi turn of the Vigorous

From the Ugaritic poem about the Wedding of the Moon God (KTU.1.24) we may learn how the month was conceived as a lifecycle of the Moon. After some difficulties of getting the consent from of Nikkal's father, the Moon God was married at the time of the sunset. The Full Moon rises at sunset. Therefore the marriage probably took place at the time of the Full Moon. The rest of the poem is concerned about the wife getting pregnant and bearing a healthy child. This is essential because the child is the New Moon. The Moon can be conceived as the power or sperm of the Moon God. When he prepares for the wedding, he accumulates sperm, and after the wedding he gives away the sperm. The Full Moon corresponds to the height of life and the Full Moon festival is the height of the month. The last four letters in the alphabet correspond to the days of the month, when the old Moon is invisible. In terms of the Bronze Age religion, the disappearance means that the Moon is dead but will be reborn. At this time Nikkal is lying in, giving birth to the New Moon. It is Nikkal's “turn”, chance or opportunity to deliver the New Moon. It is possible that the poem of the Marriage of the Moon God was used in rituals at this time of the month.

Number 29 *u*

There are no Hebrew or Ethiopic letter names. We have to look for Ugaritic words beginning with *u*, and there is only one relevant word *ur*= “light” (KTU. 1.18: IV.6,22). When we look at the Ugaritic pictogram, we see three vertical marks, and we know from letter number 5 and 14 that this means flames. The single mark under the flames is the Moon, because we have seen the Moon depicted as a single mark in letter number 3, 27 and 28. Thus the pictogram depicts the Moon, but it is still lying down invisible. The Hebrew *or* means “light”. Akkadian *uru* means “light” and this could be the Ugaritic pronunciation.

Number 30 . 's

There are no Hebrew or Ethiopic letter names. The phoneme 's has a sound between *s* and **s* (Bergsträsser 1963, XIV). To day only some Ethiopian tribes have a distinction between these three phonemes (Shabath 1989, 41). The Akkadians didn't distinguish between 's and **s* and used the symbol for **s* for both of them. In practise this is also the situation in Ugaritic, where there is only one word 'sgr= “hired helper” beginning with the symbol 's (KTU. 4, 374, 2). This word corresponds to the Hebrew word 'sakar= “hire”. Letter number 30 was only known in early Ugaritic times. The words originally beginning with the phoneme 's seem to be spelled with **s* in later Ugaritic times. In Hebrew the pronunciation of 's became like *s* maybe already in Phoenician times. This was a problem for the writing in Hebrew, because the Phoenician letter symbol **s* could be pronounced in Hebrew either as **s* or as *s*. Not until the *niqqud*= “points” were invented for the Hebrew letters in the period 500-800 AD was this problem solved. The point was put on the top left of the symbol for **s* to define the letter 's. This letter now has the name 'sin.

When we want to find the early letter name, we have to look for Hebrew words beginning with 's and Ugaritic words with **s*. The following Hebrew words are possibilities of that kind:

1. 'sova = “satiety,
2. 'sim.hah= “rejoicing”, In Ugaritic we have *sm^ht= “joy”. (KTU. 1.3: II, 24)
3. 'saraf= “burn, serpent, seraph”, Assyrian *sarapu= “burn”.

4. *'sahar*= “new moon”. Arabic **sahra*= “new moon”.Ethiopic **sahro*.

Number 4 has the best connection to the moon and will be chosen here even if the word is not found in Ugaritic. The Ugaritic **s.hr*= “dawn” (Gordon 2399) is rather close in pronunciation and meaning. The reconstructed Ugaritic letter name could be [*'shr*] with the pronunciation *'sahri*. The pictogram probably shows a Tree of Life. The Canaanite Tree of Life is probably the prototype for the seven stemmed Menorah as explained above. The last two letters of the alphabet make the verse:

ur [*'shr*] *'uru* *'sàhri* light of Moon

Today the Jews celebrate *Ro*s .Hode*s* = “First of the New”, the first day of the month” from the first sunset after the Moon is in conjunction with the Sun, and the celebration takes one or two days, when the following month has respectively 29 days or 30 days. This was different in the time of the temple as we can see from reports in Mishnah for instance (Danby 1950, Rosh ha-Shanah 3.1): “ If the court itself and all Israel had seen the new moon and the witnesses had been examined, yet night fell before they could proclaim ‘It is hallowed!’ then it is an intercalated month”. From this report we see that normally the new moon was declared as soon as the witnesses of the appearance of the Moon was examined on the 29 th day. In that case the sunset of that day was the beginning of the first day of the next month. But the appearance of the Moon could happen at any moment in the time interval from the morning of the 29 th day to the morning of the 30 th day. Sometimes there could be only few minutes from the appearance of the Moon until sunset, and there wouldn’t be time for travelling and examination of the witnesses. That case would be treated as if the Moon had appeared at the 30 th day and a month with 30 days is called an intercalated month. In many places the “rejoicing” probably started the moment when the Moon appeared of when the New Moon was declared. If this happened the 29 th day, the rest of the day until sunset could be considered as the 30 th day of the month. In this way the month would always have 30 days although the 30 th day may be of only few minutes duration. The 30 th day and the first day of the next month would be for rejoicing, and sometimes the festival for the New Moon in Ugarit lasted for seven days according to the offering lists.

For the Jews *Ro*s .Hode*s* is a religious feast, when they make benedictions in the Synagogue. In many cultures fasting is a common tradition in the period before a festival. Some orthodox Jews still have to honour the Moon (Ganzfried 1961, Chapter 97) by fasting on the 29 th day, the day preceding *Ro*s .Hode*s* and they call it *Yom Kippur Katan*= “Minor Atonement Day”. They recite special prayers, for on this day the sins of the past month are forgiven, akin to the goat that was sacrificed on *Ro*s .Hode*s* in the Temple. In the temple there was a continual burn offering in the days just before the beginning of the month. On *Ro*s .Hode*s* there is a fiesta with eating and drinking for one or two days.

In many cultures the festival for the departed takes place at the time of the appearance of the New Moon. To stay awake in the evening of the 31 st of October, with lights, cakes and wine for the departed was the old tradition in Europe which was adopted by the Catholic Church. This night is now called Halloween and in the USA it is a lively festival. The next day, November the 1st is the Day of All Saints. It is possible that even in Canaan the dead souls were invited for the New Moon party, at least in some of the months. Our knowledge about the cult of the departed in Ugarit is well established (Dietrich et al. 1976, 45-52). The ghosts, the dead souls “*rpim*” of the netherworld are invited to a party at El’s place. They have to travel for three days before they reach their goal: “the barns and the plantations”. This party must be on the day of the New Moon when El has offerings and El’s place is the place of the living. Especially for the “*rpim*” of the king, the royal ancestors, there was a funerary cult with celebration of ritual banquets. In an Ugaritic text (KTU. 1.22,II), (de Moor 1972, 12) King Danel has a New Year party, which is at the time of New Moon in the month of the new wine. Here the ghosts of the dead are raised and entertained, and Danel can communicate with his dead son. “The blessing of the name of El substantiated the heroes”. The “*rpim*” had control of the powers of life and death, and they could be asked for favours. *Rpim* also means “healers”

The Jews today celebrate **Sàbat* as well as *Ro*s .Hode*s*, but in ancient times there was no **Sàbat*, and the *Ro*s .Hode*s* was the most important fiesta. In the Old Testament we read (1.Sam. 20.5-6): “Then David said to Jonathan: ’See, to morrow is New Moon and I definitely ought to sit and eat with the king

(Saul), but you must send me away, then I will hide in the field until the evening on the third day. If your father obviously observes my absence, then you shall say: ‘David asked me for permission to run to his town Bethlehem, for there is an annual offering for the whole family’”. Saul’s New Moon-party was private and we can see the same thing in the following offering list from Ugarit (RS 24.249, 1-2)

yrh . hyr . b ym . hdt In the month of *iyar* on the day of the New Moon
*alp . w *s . l bclt bhtm* ox and sheep for the goddess of the houses

We don’t know the name of the goddess of the houses, but this expression may indicate that the offering was a private offering. The goddess was probably Anat.

The last two verses of the alphabet are parallel, “the Vigorous” is parallel to “moon” and “turn” is parallel to “light”. The parallelism appears because both verses announce a new period of life. The new born Crescent is a manifestation of the power of the Creator-God for making a new life. He can make our life continue and make it happy. Even when we are dead he can save our souls. Every New Moon is a repetition of the universal drama where the question is if life will defeat death. A typical example from a Jewish prayer for *Ro*s .Hode*s* is the following (Tephilath 1917,)

Atah gibor leolam You are mighty forever,
adonay me.hayeh metim O Lord awake the deceased for a new life,
*atah rav leho*siya* your saving help is abundant.

The rituals in Canaan at the time of the New Moon may have something to do with the Ugaritic myth of Baal’s fight with Mot. Mot means “death”. This myth is normally explained as a description of the changing seasons of the year, and some scholars think that a cultic drama was performed in the temple in the autumn, when the rainy season started. Margalit (Margalit 1980, 202) on the other hand emphasises the aspect of life and death in general: “Mot’s enormous strength, symbolised by his unlimited ability to take away life, is circumscribed by his inability to grant or restore it. In order to ensure his supply of food, Mot needs Baal.”

People’s thoughts about their life and destiny may also be visualised in their seals. Figure 14 shows a typical seal from Bronze Age Syria. Here we see the Crescent at a central place of the scenery. The disc above the Crescent is mostly interpreted as the Sun, but when it has a little circle with rays in four directions I believe it could be interpreted as the daylight including the light from the Sun. In that way this very common symbol shows that the situation is surveyed by the creator of day and night: El. The Moon borrows the light from the Sun in the daytime, carries the light in the night and gives the light back to the Sun in the morning. The Moon also brings back the light when the New Moon appears. This could explain that the Moon seems to carry the Sky. We see an eight-pointed star which is probably a symbol of the sky, which means that Asherat is also observing what happens. We see the Weather-God Hadad holding the tree of life which he gives to the Birth Goddess Anat. And Hadad is standing on the serpent of the underworld, the Death-God Mot. Mot seems quite content with the situation. He has delivered the Tree of Life from the ground. The scapegoat with its hindlegs tied is probably Mot’s food. The scapegoat must be sacrificed on the day of the New Moon, as said in the Old Testament (Num. 28.15). Anat is naked ready to conceive. In her hands she has a protecting mantle and flower buds. From the alphabet poem we know that she is protecting the deceased in the tomb as well as the new-born at the breast. Hadad can be seen as her first trial. The main sphere of authority for Hadad as well as for Anat is the city state and the life of people there. This includes the destiny after death. Hadad is a hope for the deceased because he has traversed the underworld. Hadad was called *rpu* = “healer, saviour”. He was supposed to be able to heal the dead, to revive the spirits of the dead (KTU. 1.21). Deceased kings and other powerful persons were supposed to become gods and join Hadad as stars of heaven. He was the leader of the dead spirits *rpim*. Hadad has horns and a pigtail. Behind him is an attendant without horns and therefore a human. He is kneeling and worshipping and he probably represents the owner of the seal. I believe that the scenery of Figure 14 has to do with the personal life and destiny of the owner of the seal.

The “weather god” Hadad here has the function as a “saviour god”. He is the active part of the team of gods. He is able to make life happy for the worshipper and help his soul when he is dead. Other gods of that type are Osiris and Jesus.



Figure 14. Impression of a Syrian cylinder seal. 1800 B.C.- 1600 B.C. (Gorelick et al. Pl.I,3)

The story of the renewal of life is also told on the seal in Figure 10. Between Hadad and Mot we have the Ankh-cross meaning “life” and the Crescent meaning “creation”. The goddess sitting in heaven could be Asherat. The woman in front of her, possibly Anat, is lamenting, possibly for the buried Hadad. Beside the dead Hadad, is the Sun (Shamash) is seen leading him through the underworld.

The seal in Figure 12 tells another story. We already mentioned Asherat. Above her is the hand of the Creator El, symbolising that his presence is necessary for a creation. The lions are symbols of the power of Asherat. On top of the lions is the creation, a deity because of her slender waist. The deity is naked and could be Anat, “The mother of the Nations”. I interpret the two assisting deities beside

Anat as Moon-Gods. On Anat’s right hand side Yarikh flies with the Crescent. On the other side Nikkal flies with the hand of El, necessary for her birth-giving.

The Alphabet Poem

The result of the study of the early letter names can be summarised in the following poem. This poem is a list of all the letter names in the alphabetic order. Here written in Ugaritic, vocalised Ugaritic and English.

..... Ugaritic	Vocalised Ugaritic	... English meaning	Latin Letters
<i>alp bt</i>	<i>àlfu beti</i>	the ox of the temple	A B
<i>gml h.t</i>	<i>gamlu ha.t.ti</i>	crescent of the sceptre	C()
<i>[d]clt hdd</i>	<i>dacltu haddi</i>	fuel for the Howler	DE
<i>[w]qy zg[n]</i>	<i>waqeyu za*gani</i>	veneration of the Pealer	F()
<i>.hrt [t]it</i>	<i>.haratu .tai.ti</i>	ploughing of soil	H()
<i>ydm kp</i>	<i>yadamu kafi</i>	hands of hollow	JK

<i>*sn la[b]</i>	<i>*sennu laavi</i>	shine of flame	()L
<i>my drq</i>	<i>màyu daraqi</i>	water of sprinkling	M()
<i>n.h*s .zhr</i>	<i>na.h*su .zahari</i>	serpent of brightness	N()
<i>sad cnt</i>	<i>saadu cnati</i>	serving of the Source	()O
<i>pcr .sdq</i>	<i>pacaru .sadaqi</i>	proclaiming of the Righteous	P()
<i>qbr ri*s</i>	<i>qavaru ree*si</i>	burial of the first	QR
<i>td *glm</i>	<i>tadu *galumu</i>	breast for youth	S()
<i>twr ib</i>	<i>tawru ebbi</i>	turn of the Vigorous	T()
<i>ur ['shr]</i>	<i>uru 'sahri</i>	light of Moon	()()

The poem is composed of 15 verses, each made of two letter names. All the verses except verse number seven form parallellisms, and therefore the poem here is written in eight strophes.

The poem has four parts:

Part 1. the Waxing Moon, three strophes, one about El and two about Hadad

Part 2. the Full Moon, one strophe, religious festival

Part 3. the Waning Moon, three strophes, one about Asherat and two about Anat

Part 4. the New Moon, one strophe, religious festival

The first and third part are very symmetric. They are both composed of three strophes with four letter names each. The first of the three strophes introduces the highest authority in this sphere of the universe. The two supreme deities and ancestors of all other gods are El and Asherat. El is the initiator, creator of the forms and creatures in the world. He owns the wide space between the sky and the sea. Asherat is the gracious preserver and procurer of biological life. She owns the sky, the earth and the sea. The second strophe in each of the two symmetric parts introduces the local deities for the nation Hadad and Anat respectively. The strophe prescribes how to worship these deities. It is a matter of life and death for the nation and for the individual to support these deities by offering and praising. The third strophe in the

two parts gives us a general idea of what Hadad and Anat do for people. Hadad gives good weather, reproduction in agriculture, strength and male fertility. Anat gives female fertility, sound offspring and takes care of the people who must die. The description of the deities can only be very general in the poem. The Ugaritic gods have many activities and there are many other gods. Baal for example has seven boars to help him and Anat has seven Kotharots to help her with deliveries.

The letter names correspond to the days of the month, but there is no indication that the letter names were used as names for the days. In the Ugaritic offering lists, the days just have numbers. We might expect the letter name to give information about the religious practice of that day. From the little we know about the religious practice this is only the case with the day of the New Moon, the two days of Full Moon, the first day of the Waning Moon and the last four days of the invisible Moon. It would be too much to expect the individual letter names to give such information, when they have to make a meaningful poem. The alphabet is a symbol of the world, because any word can be formed by combining some letters. We have the expression “alpha and omega” meaning “everything”. Therefore the subject of the poem is the whole world and the human life. The poem gives a precise description of the main deities, their spheres of authority, and the way to worship them. The male gods are classed with the Waxing Moon, presumably because the construction of form and creating a new being are male qualities. But this does not exclude the possibility that the male gods could be worshipped at other times of the month. In a similar way, the goddesses were classed with the Waning Moon, because preserving the being and giving away nourishment and fruits are female qualities.

Many cultures with a Moon calendar have definite rules for which activities (like agricultural work, warfare, marriage and sexual intercourse) may be done at different times of the month. This was probably the same in Ugarit, but the alphabet poem does not give us direct information about it. When the pregnancy begins at the time of a Full Moon and takes 280 days, delivery will be at the time of a New Moon.

Conclusion

We have been able to reconstruct the alphabet poem composed of the early letter names. The choice of the early letter names in the poem is my responsibility. Some of the early letter names in the poem could be chosen differently, but this wouldn't change the general meaning and structure of the poem. So far all the empirical information from textual and iconographical material confirms the three hypotheses, I proposed. So from now on, they will be theories:.

1.

The Ugaritic letter symbols are pictograms, having the same meaning as the corresponding early letter names.

2.

The Ugaritic alphabet is a poem.

3.

The alphabet was invented in a Canaanite temple. The 30 letters is a list of the days in a month.

In accordance with theory 1, we now understand the meaning of the Ugaritic letter pictograms and their sequence. As a consequence of that, we are now almost certain about the meaning of the Proto-Canaanite letter pictograms, which are the ancestors of the Phoenician letter symbols, and this will give better possibilities for deciphering Proto-Canaanite inscriptions. On the other hand we have found that a few of the Proto-Canaanite letters used in Sinai have other symbols and names than in the rest of Canaan. The rest of the Proto-Canaanite and Phoenician alphabet seem to belong to the same tradition as the Ugaritic 30-letter alphabet, where eight letters are omitted. We have also been able to explain the South-Arabian letter symbols and it is almost certain that they are pictograms with the meaning of their letter name. The

South-Arabic letter names seem to be inherited from the Phoenician letter names. The Ethiopic letter names have preserved the early letter names better than have the Hebrew letter names. From this we can conclude that the Ethiopic letter names are borrowed from the South-Arabic names.

The Alphabet Poem that we have found is (as far as we know) the first alphabet ever, and theories 2 and 3 give an explanation of how the alphabet was invented. If we believe in these theories, I think it will have some consequences for the studying of dead languages. It's a common mistake that alphabets are constructed just to have one symbol for each phoneme. Ugaritic has 30 symbols because the month has 30 days. Some of the 30 letters are unnecessary. The two letters *s* and *š* probably had the same pronunciation in Ugaritic. The two letters *q* and *k* also have the same pronunciation. Even in Ugaritic there was some confusion about which of them to use. *q* and *k* are still used in Hebrew. This is because writing has its own rules and traditions. You can't drop a letter, when it is in use in the writing of some words. On the other hand, some phonemes like *v* and *f* don't have their own letter symbol in Ugaritic. So we must then be careful when using the alphabet to find out how the dead languages were spoken.

From the Alphabet Poem we can learn about the life and beliefs of ancient Canaan. The analysis of the poem is here mostly done in order to find meaningful letter names. This analysis should be carried on in order to find a more profound understanding of it. Some of the poem is a confirmation of what we already know from the Ugaritic texts and from the Old Testament. The alphabet poem gives a very precise description of the sphere of authority of the principal gods. Now we are able to have a better understanding of the significance of the Moon in Prehistoric Times. The alphabet poem was invented in some Canaanite temple, and the question may be asked if the ideas here are valid for other parts of the population in the city state, for other parts of Canaan, for other parts of the World or for other times. This problem is general for all history of religion. Every individual has his individual ideas. The religious ideas in the alphabet poem are probably those of the temple elite. But the ideas about the function of the gods do not contradict the information we already have about the Canaanite religion. The alphabet poem gives us some new aspects that we may use to explain the religion in other places and times. As an example I propose that the Middle East goddess Mari (=“sea”) should be understood as the “heavenly sea” and that her function is similar to Asherah. Mari is probably the same as the later well known Mary, Queen of Heaven.

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